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Percussion Fast and Cheap

For families and elementary music teachers, suggestions for percussion instruments that require little or no money and minimum effort.

Making a musical instrument can be an exciting, rewarding, major project. But it doesn't have to be! Here are some suggestions for quick, cheap, and easy ways to make "musical instruments" for your family or students, for music classes, informal concerts, or just exploration. If you need some inspiration to get into the right spirit, I strongly recommend watching a video of a performance by "Stomp," for example [Stomp Plungers](#) or [Stomp Kitchen](#). If you would like even more ideas on making your own instruments, [The Mudcat Cafe](#) had many good, relatively easy suggestions as of this writing. In fact many books and websites include suggestions for homemade instruments, ranging from the very simple, to elaborate projects that can produce impressive instruments. The suggestions below fall in the "very simple" category.

Body Percussion

- Hand claps
- Hand rubs
- Finger snaps
- Foot stomps
- Foot shuffles
- Knee or thigh slaps
- Chest, tummy, and shoulder slaps
- Tongue clicks - see how many different sounds you can make this way!
- Finger flicks against a cheek - again, you can get very different sounds depending on what you are doing with your mouth

Drumsticks - Different drumsticks or beaters will give the same "instrument" many different sounds.

- Hands, fingers, thumbs
- Sticks, pens, pencils, rulers
- Short lengths of dowel or bamboo
- For a "brushed percussion" sound, use a kitchen basting brush, a scrubbing brush, a large, stiff paint brush, or wire brush

- Spoons

Beaters - Secure one of the following onto the end of a stick, a pencil, or a short length of 1/2" dowel.

- A cork
- A large wooden bead
- Wrap many rubber bands around one end of the stick
- A rubber ball or "superball"
- Wrap one end of the stick, or wrap the bead or ball, with yarn or string
- Wrap felt or cloth around the end of the stick, or around the bead or ball

Drums - Real drums (instruments in which you beat on a thin, taut membrane) are quite sophisticated, difficult-to-construct instruments. Here are some easy stand-ins.

- Empty plastic milk jugs
- Upside-down pails, buckets, basins, or large cans
- Empty plastic tubs (like margarine or ice cream tubs) with the lids on - usually, the bigger the tub, the better.
- Lid or bottom (or both) of a large, empty coffee can
- A sheet of canvas, plastic, plastic wrap, plastic bag, rubber, wrapping paper, waxed paper, or poster board stretched very taut over the lip of a wooden bowl or a clay flowerpot, held in place by strong tape, heavy rubber bands, or strong cord. Most "drums" made in this way will be much more delicate than real drums.
- The bottom of an empty cylindrical oatmeal box
- Don't forget the traditional favorite: pots and pans
- Two of any of these in different sizes is a set of bongos

Fillers for Shakers - Different fillers can make very different sounds. Some will last better than others, and some will be messier to work with than others. You may want to seal your shakers once you have made them.

- Dry rice, noodles, or beans
- Unpopped popcorn

- Beads or sequins of any size (different sizes and kinds will make different sounds)
- Nuts or seeds
- Pebbles
- Sand or salt
- Bottle caps (If you can make holes in the bottle caps you can also string them together to make rattles or tambourines.)

Containers for shakers or maracas - To turn your shaker into a maraca, make a hole in the container, put a stick, pencil, or short length of 1/2" dowel into the hole, and tape it together.

- Paper bag or plastic bag
- Plastic Easter egg
- Empty plastic tubs with lids
- Dried gourd - very authentic and easy to grow in many places
- Hollow balls, for example tennis balls and plastic "softballs" - you'll have to make a hole in them to fill them; so you might as well make maracas
- Some seed pods come already filled with dried seeds and make great shakers
- Make your own with papier-mache.

Cymbals, Gongs, Bells and Triangles - The trick to getting a good sound out of these instruments is to let them vibrate freely. Don't touch the part that is supposed to "ring" with your fingers or anything soft. Hold it by a handle, hang it from a piece of string (make a hole in the object, or tape the string to it), or set it on a hard surface.

- Metal bowls that are a single curved surface (with no extra rim on the bottom to steady them) make great gongs. Set them on a hard surface. For a really cool effect, try swirling a very small amount of water in the bowl and strike it while the water is still swirling.
- A metal clothes hanger
- Trash can lids or pot lids
- Metal pie plate
- Hung flowerpots (use a soft beater)
- The chimes from a windchime

- Hammer large nails to different depths in a piece of lumber. Use another large nail as a beater to strike the nails in the wood.
- For home-made wood blocks or marimba, rest hardwood boards or pieces of bamboo of different lengths across two other pieces of lumber.
- String jingle bells or bottle caps on yarn, ribbon, or string to make hand, ankle, or wrist jingles.

Guiros and Washboards - These instruments are played by scraping a hard stick or beater across the corrugations.

- Heavy corrugated cardboard
- Wrap and glue heavy string around a short piece of 1" dowel.
- Cheese grater
- Saw, file, whittle, or cut notches into a piece of dowel or 1X1 lumber, or a thick stick. Notch spacing should be on the order of 1/8"-1/4".
- Sandpaper

Sticks and Clicks

- Stamping stick - A large, thick stick can be played by "stamping" it on the floor or in a bucket or basin.
- Claves - Cut two short lengths of dowel, lumber, or sticks (about 1" diameter, and about 6" long) to beat against each other. Smooth, hard wood gives the best sound. Make the sound more resonant by holding one clave cupped lightly in one hand while hitting it with the other.
- Play thick pieces of bamboo as you would claves, or hang them and play them like gongs.
- Pencils and wooden spoons can also be played like claves, but the sound will be much softer.
- Finger Castanets - tie one button onto the thumb, and another onto the middle finger. Or use the halves of a walnut shell or small metal jar lids
- Hand Castanets - loosely hold two spoons close together, back-to-back, in one hand, and swing them against the other hand to make them click.
- Shake keys on a key ring, or click them against the palm of the hand.

Not Percussion

- The easiest way to get a "string" sound is to stretch rubber bands between fingers, nails, or thumbtacks, or around tubs or boxes. An old-fashioned wash tub bass, made using a small metal tub, broom handle, and thick string, is fairly easy to construct.
- Blow across the lip of a glass jug or bottle.
- The easiest "wind instrument" to make is a kazoo, which you play by humming into it. Use a square of waxed paper or tissue paper, and either rubber-band it onto one end of a cardboard tube or fold it over the teeth of a small comb.
- You can make a simple "horn" or "trumpet" by taping a tin funnel to the end of a yard or two of garden hose, plastic pool tubing, or any other flexible tubing about 1" in diameter, but getting a sound out of your instrument may require a real mouthpiece and someone who knows how to play a brass instrument.

Looking for something to do with your percussion? Try:

- [Simple Rhythm Activities](#)
- [Talking Drums](#)
- [Message Drums](#)
- [Calypso and Found Percussion](#)
- [Conducting Activities](#)
- [A Dynamics Activity](#)
- [An Accent Activity](#)
- [Sound and Music](#) has suggestions for very simple "instruments" that demonstrate principles of acoustics.

Sound and Music Activities

Lesson plans for investigative activities, appropriate for grades 3-6, that introduce the physics of sound and music, and that explore the ways musical instruments make sounds.

Introduction

Different musical instruments produce sounds in very different ways, but all of them take advantage of some of the fundamental properties of sound - the physics of sound - to make a variety of interesting and pleasant sounds. You will find here a [Strings Activity](#), [Wind Instrument Activity](#), [Percussion Activity](#), and [Resonance Activity](#), as well as [worksheets](#) appropriate for younger students. All of these explore some [basic concepts](#) of sound wave physics (**acoustics**) while demonstrating how various musical instruments produce sounds.

Goals and Standards

- **Goals** - The student will develop an understanding of the physical (scientific) causes of musical sounds, and be able to use appropriate scientific and/or musical terminology to discuss the variety of possible musical sounds.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 8 (understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts)
- **Other Subjects Addressed** - In encouraging active exploration of the effects of physics on music and musical instruments, these activities also address [National Science Education Standards](#) in **physical science** and in **science and technology**.
- **Grade Level** - 3-8
- **Student Prerequisites** - If younger students are not ready to conduct their own lightly-supervised investigations, these activities should be done as full-classroom demonstrations.
- **Teacher Expertise** - Teacher expertise in music is not necessary to present this activity. The teacher should be familiar and comfortable with basic acoustics terms and concepts (see [Acoustics for Music Theory](#)).

- **Time Requirements** - Reserve one (approximately 45-minute) class period for each activity/discussion, and one class period to finish discussions, draw conclusions, do worksheets, and reinforce terms and concepts. If you have a longer period of time and a large area to work in, you may want to set up each experiment as a "work station" and have student groups move from one station to another.

You can do any one or any combination of the activities. While doing them, introduce whichever of the terms and concepts you think will benefit your students. You can either use only the scientific terms, or only the musical terms, or both. To reinforce the concepts and terms with younger students, follow the activities with the worksheets in the [Terms and Concepts](#) section below. For older students, present the relevant information from [Frequency, Wavelength, and Pitch](#), [Amplitude and Dynamics](#), and [Transverse and Longitudinal Waves](#), and include the worksheet and handout from [Talking About Sound and Music](#).

Terms and Concepts

During or after your activities, introduce the following terms and concepts to the students. Worksheets to help you do this with younger students are available here as PDF files: [Terms Worksheet](#), [Matching Worksheet](#), [Answer sheet](#). (Or you may copy the [figures](#).) With younger students, you may also want to study [Sound and Ears](#). For older students, use the worksheet and handout in [Talking About Sound and Music](#). For more detailed information on this subject, you may also see [Talking about Sound and Music](#), [Frequency, Wavelength, and Pitch](#), [Amplitude and Dynamics](#), [Transverse and Longitudinal Waves](#), [Standing Waves and Musical Instruments](#), [Standing Waves and Wind Instruments](#), or [Acoustics for Music Theory](#). Use the discussion questions during and after the activities to help the students reach conclusions about their investigations.

Terms and Concepts

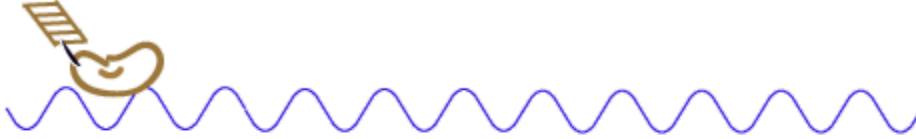
- **Sound Waves** - When something vibrates, it makes a sound. The vibrations travel out in all directions from the "something" in the same way that ripples travel out from a pebble that has been dropped in water. But instead of being waves of water, these are waves of

vibrations of air: **sound waves**. Because it is the air itself that is vibrating, sound waves, unlike water waves, are invisible.

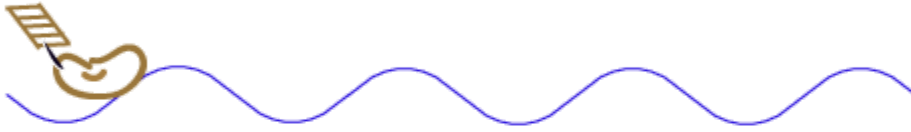
- **Frequency** - or **Pitch** - Think of water waves again. They can be close together or far apart. If they are close together, there are more of them; they are more frequent. **Frequency** is the term that scientists and engineers use to describe how many pulses of a sound wave arrive at your ear in one second. Musicians use the term **pitch**. A sound with a higher frequency (more waves) has a higher pitch, and sounds higher.
- **Amplitude** - or **Dynamic Level** - Water waves can also be great, big, tall waves, or small ripples. The size of a wave is called its **amplitude**. In sound waves, the bigger the wave, the louder the sound is. Musicians call the loudness of a sound its **dynamic level**.

Differences in Waves

This ear-shaped boat is not moving downstream with the waves because it is tied to the dock. It only moves up and down as the waves arrive, as your eardrum vibrates whenever a sound wave arrives. Which waves are like soft sounds? Loud sounds? Which waves are like low sounds? High sounds?



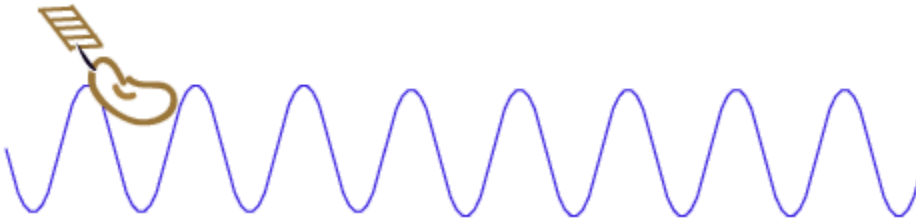
Waves can be short and close together...



or they can be long and far apart.



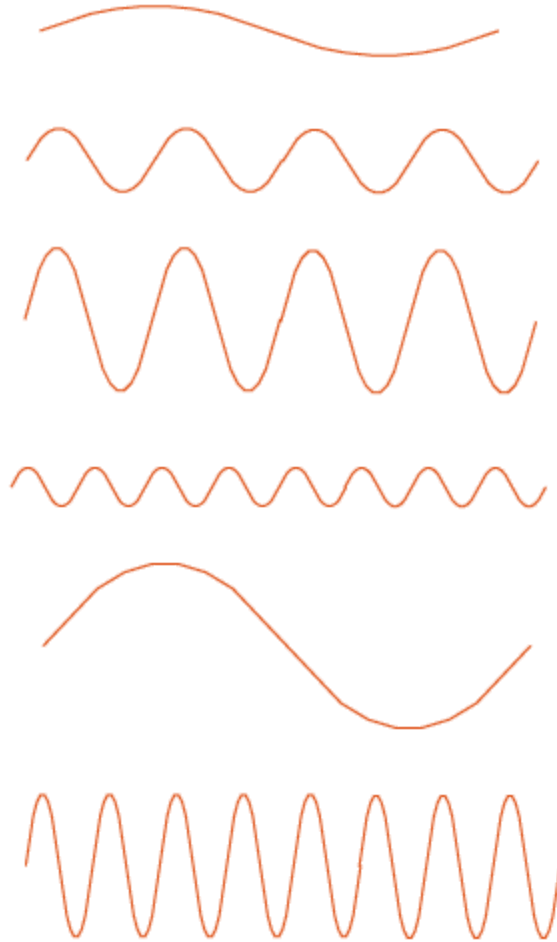
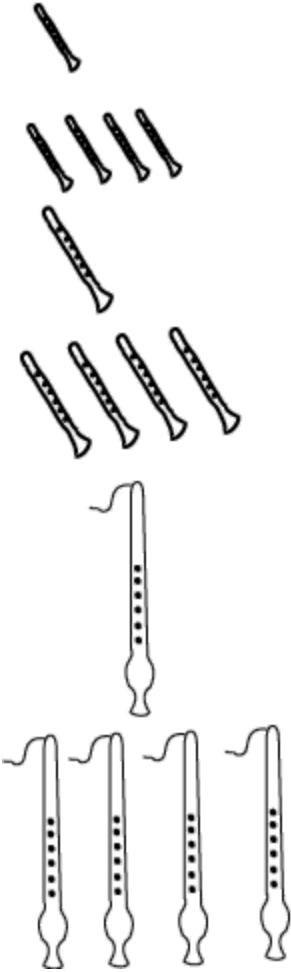
Waves can be small, with not much difference between the low points and high points...

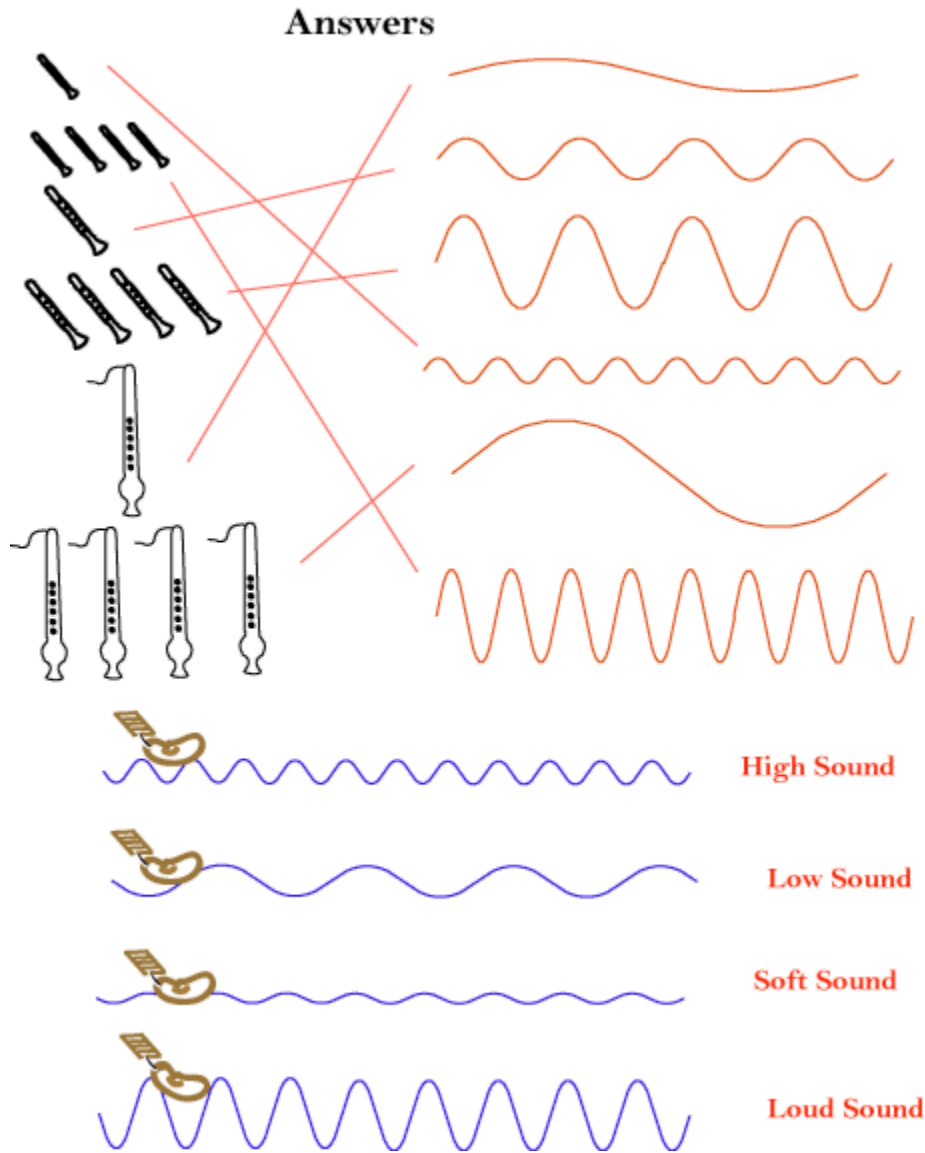


Or they can be piled up high.

Match the Sound Waves

Which size instrument will make a high sound? A low sound? Which waves show a high sound?
Which waves show a louder sound and which show a softer one?
Draw a line from each instrument or group of instruments to the correct sound wave.





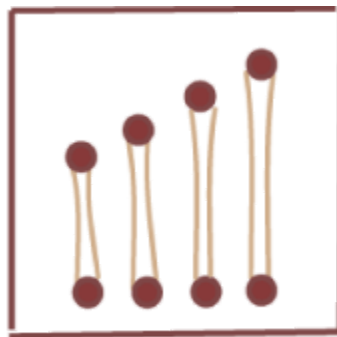
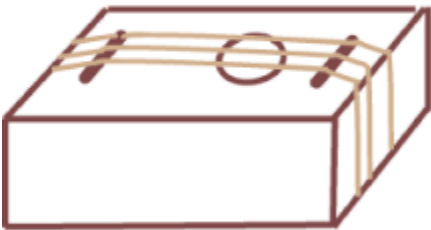
Strings Activity

Objectives and Assessment

- **Objectives** - The student will construct a simplified version of a stringed instrument, using rubber bands as strings, and will use the instrument to explore the effects of various string characteristics on frequency and amplitude.
- **Evaluation** - Assess student learning using worksheets or answers to discussion questions.

Materials and Preparation

- Most students will be able to do this experiment alone or in small groups. If you do not want students working with thumbtacks, plan to use boxes or pans as instrument bodies.
- You will need lots of rubber bands, as many different lengths and thicknesses and tightnesses as you can find. If you are using boxes, the rubber bands must be long enough to stretch around a box.
- You will also need either small, sturdy cardboard or plastic boxes or containers, with or without lids, OR pieces (about 8" X 10" or so) of thick, flat cardboard, OR square or rectangular baking pans, one for each student or group.
- If you are using flat cardboard, you will also need thumbtacks or push pins.
- If you are using a lidded box, pencils, pens, or other objects approximately the size and shape of a pencil (a couple for each instrument) will be useful.
- You may want scissors that are strong enough to cut the cardboard or plastic.
- If a stringed-instrument player is available for a show-and-tell, you may want to include this after the activity, to demonstrate and reinforce some of the main points. Any stringed instrument (guitar, violin, harp, etc.) will do.
- For older or more independent students, you may want to make copies of the [discussion questions](#).



Procedure

1. Each student or group should choose a variety of rubber bands (3-6, depending on the size of their "instruments") to start with.
2. If you are using flat cardboard, stretch each rubber band between two thumbtacks so that it is tight enough to give a particular pitch.
3. If using a box or baking pan, stretch the rubber bands around the box or pan.
4. Have the students pluck each rubber band separately and listen carefully to the "twang". They are listening for which ones sound higher and which sound lower.
5. To try many different thicknesses and tightnesses, students can trade rubber bands with each other or trade off from the central pile if there are enough.
6. Students with the thumbtack instruments can vary length and tightness by changing the distance between the thumbtacks.
7. Students with box or pan instruments can vary tightness by pulling on the rubber band at the side of the box while plucking it at the top. Students with lidded box instruments can vary length by slipping a pencil under each end of the rubber bands on the top of the box and then varying the distance between the pencils, or even holding the rubber band down tightly with a finger between the pencils, in the same way as a real string player.
8. Students with box instruments can also see if the body of the instrument makes any difference to the sound. Can they play the instrument with the lid off and with it on? Does cutting a hole in the lid change the sound? Does it make it easier to play? Does adding the pencils change the sound or make it easier to play? Do different boxes make a different sound with the same rubber bands? Do cardboard boxes sound different from plastic ones?
9. Ask younger students the discussion questions while they are experimenting. Allow them to check and answer immediately. Summarize the answers for them on the board, or remind them and let them write them down when they are done experimenting. Give older students a list of the discussion questions before they begin.

Discussion Questions

- Do thicker rubber band "strings" sound higher or lower than thinner ones? (Answer: thicker should sound lower.)
- Do tighter strings sound higher or lower than looser ones? (Tighter should sound higher.)
- Do shorter strings sound higher or lower than longer ones? (Shorter should sound higher.)
- Do there seem to be differences in how loud and soft or how dull or clear a string sounds? If so, what seems to cause those differences?
- What determines whether the sound of a string is loud or soft?
- What happens to the sound if they pluck with one finger while touching the string lightly with another finger? (No "twang"; the touch stops the vibrations.) If their instrument design allows it, what happens when they hold the string tightly down against the instrument and then pluck it? (The shorter vibrating length should give a higher pitch.)
- After their experiments, can they explain what happens when a player holds a string down with a finger? What if the same string is held down in a different spot?
- Based on their observations, do the students feel they could tell which strings of an instrument are the low strings just by looking at them closely? (For an extra activity, arrange for them to try this with a real instrument.)
- Can the students come up with possible reasons why the thickness, length, and tightness of a string affect its frequency/pitch in the way that they do? (For example, why does a shorter string have a higher frequency/pitch?) (It may help on length to remind them that the longer the waves are, the less frequent they will be.)

Wind Instruments Activity

Objectives and Assessment

- **Objectives** - The student will explore the effects of air column size (and shape) on the frequency and amplitude of standing waves in the air column, using empty glass bottles, and water if necessary to vary air column size.
- **Evaluation** - Assess student learning using worksheets or answers to discussion questions.

Materials and Preparation

- If you do not want your students working with glass jugs and water, plan to do this as a demonstration.
- You will need several narrow-necked bottles, all the same size and shape OR several narrow-necked bottles of varying sizes and shapes. Bottles should be empty and clean. Make sure before the class begins that your bottles give a clear, reasonably loud sound when you blow across the top of them. If necessary, practice getting a sound. Large glass jugs with an inner lip diameter of approximately one inch work well.
- If using bottles of the same size, you will also need water to fill them to varying depths. If you are using this approach, food coloring is very useful to clearly show the depth of the water.
- If plastic recorders are available to your students, or a player of a [woodwind](#) or [brass](#) instrument is available for a show-and-tell, they can be used for an extra demonstration.
- For older or more independent students, you may want to make copies of the [discussion questions](#).



Procedure

1. If using same-size bottles and water, fill each bottle to a different depth (for example, an inch in one bottle, two inches in another, three inches in a third and so on). If you have food coloring, add a few drops to the water in each bottle so it is easy to see the depths.
2. Make the air in a bottle vibrate by blowing steadily across the top of the bottle.

3. "Play" each bottle in turn, and arrange them in order from the highest sound to the lowest.
4. If you have the time and inclination, you can even try to "tune" the bottles by adding or pouring out water.
5. If recorders or a wind instrument are available, demonstrate how covering and uncovering the holes on the instrument changes the pitch. Explain that the main vibration in the instrument is happening in the air inside the instrument (just like the air in the bottles), in between the mouthpiece and the first hole that the air can escape from..

Discussion Questions

- If using bottles of different shapes and sizes, how does the size of the bottle affect the pitch/frequency? Does the shape of the bottle seem to affect it?
- Does the size and shape of the bottle seem to affect anything else, like the loudness of the sound or the tone quality?
- What do you think explains these effects?
- If using water in bottles, how does the amount of water affect the pitch/frequency? Why? (You may need to remind the students that it is the air in the bottle that is vibrating; more water means a smaller space for the air; smaller space means shorter waves and higher frequency/pitch).
- How is a bottle "instrument" the same as a [wind](#) instrument, and how is it different?
- If demonstrating with instruments: How does opening and closing the holes of the instruments change the pitch? Why? (Answer: the shorter the distance between the mouthpiece and the first open hole, the shorter the waves and the higher the pitch/frequency. Opening and closing other holes further down the instrument from the first open hole may have no discernible effect - they are not changing the length of the vibrating column of air - or if they are affecting the vibrating air a little, they may change the sound enough to make it more or less in tune.) If a brass instrument is used, what is the effect of opening a valve or extending the slide? (Opening valves actually lengthens the instrument, by opening up extra tubing, lowering the pitch.)

Percussion Activity

Objectives and Assessment

- **Objectives** - The student will assist in constructing a "found objects" chime, and will use the instrument to explore the effects of various object characteristics on frequency and amplitude.
- **Evaluation** - Assess student learning using worksheets or answers to discussion questions.

Materials and Preparation

- Each working group will need a dowel, rod, or small beam, around 4-6 feet long, held at both ends about five feet off the ground.
- Each group will need a variety of objects of different sizes and materials. Forks, spoons, spatulas, rulers, wind chimes, lengths of chain, lengths of pipe or bamboo or tubing, are all easy to line up below the dowel because they are long and thin. Objects that have holes or handles (slotted spoons, pan lids) making it easier to keep them tied on, are also a good idea. Objects that are metal, hardwood, hard plastic, hollow, and/or made in a single piece are most likely to make easy-to-hear, interesting sounds.
- It may be easier to answer some of the discussion question if some of the objects are similar objects in a variety of sizes, for example small medium and large metal spoons.
- You will need enough string to hang the objects from the dowels, and may need tape to keep the objects on the string. Keep in mind, though, that tape will probably dampen the vibrations of the object so that it won't "ring" as long.
- You will need something the students can use to strike the objects; a wooden spoon, short stick, pen or pencil, or ruler. Or they can experiment with using different objects as "drumsticks". Which do the students prefer and why?
- For older or more independent students, you may want to make copies of the [discussion questions](#).



Procedure

1. Have the students hang the objects securely from the dowel.
2. The students should then strike the objects one at a time, listening carefully to the sound each object typically makes.

Discussion Questions

- Does the size of the object seem to affect its pitch/frequency? Its loudness?
- Does the shape of the object seem to affect its pitch/frequency? Its loudness?
- Does the object's material seem to affect its pitch/frequency? Its loudness?
- Can you tell what effects the thickness of an object has on its sound?
- What seems to affect how long a sound lasts?
- What objects make the sounds that you like best? Which do you think would make good percussion instruments? Why?
- Which of these effects do you think you can explain in terms of waves and the vibrations the objects must be making?

Instrument Body Activities

Objectives and Assessment

- **Objectives** - The student will construct a simple megaphone, and will use the megaphone and a music box in several simple investigations to explore the effects that the body of an instrument has on its sound.
- **Evaluation** - Assess student learning using worksheets or answers to discussion questions.

Materials and Preparation

- Decide whether each step of this investigation will be a teacher demonstration or an individual or small-group activity.
- You will need a music box.
- You will need several large, flat surfaces of different types of materials - different types of wood and metal as well as plastic and softer surfaces will be particularly instructive. A box or drawer made of hardwood is optional.
- You will also need large sheets of paper, construction paper, newspaper, soft, pliable plastic or foam or poster board, and some tape, OR a megaphone. If you have a variety of megaphone materials, have different students use different materials to see if material choice affects the sound.
- For older or more independent students, you may want to make copies of the [discussion questions](#).

Procedure

1. Wind the music box and let everyone listen to it while holding it in your hand.
2. Place the box on different surfaces and listen to the difference it makes in the sound. Continue to wind it as necessary to hear a long example of each surface. If you can, place the music box inside a wooden box or drawer.
3. If you do not have a real megaphone to demonstrate, let the students make their own megaphones by rolling the paper into a cone shape, open at both ends. Tape it if necessary to hold the shape.
4. Let them talk or sing into their megaphones and otherwise experiment with how the megaphone changes sounds. Experiment with different megaphone sizes and shapes (narrow or widely flaring).

Discussion Questions

- What effect does each surface have on the sound from the music box? What is causing these effects? (Answer: some surfaces will vibrate with the music box if they are touching. See [Resonance](#).)

- Why do instruments have bodies; why aren't they just a bunch of strings or a reed or a membrane to beat on?
- Why would an instrument maker choose to make an instrument body out of wood (like a violin or piano)? Why might metal be chosen (as in brass and many percussion instruments)? Of the other materials you experimented with, would you make instruments out of them? What kind of instrument with each material? Why?
- How does a megaphone shape change a sound? Does it matter whether the megaphone is narrow or flaring?
- How do you think the megaphones would have changed if they had been made of wood or of metal?
- Would a violin sound louder if you were sitting right in front of it or next to it? What about a trumpet? What's the difference?
- Based on your observations, what do you think the shape of the instrument does to the sound of a tuba, trumpet, trombone, clarinet, or saxophone? What about flutes and bassoons (which do not flare)?

Consonance and Dissonance Activities

Lesson plans for four activities that introduce students of any age to the musical concepts of consonance and dissonance, and encourage them to relate these concepts to other disciplines.

Introduction

Below are lesson plans for four activities that are designed to allow students to explore the concepts of consonance and dissonance in music. [Activity 1](#) and [Activity 2](#) introduce the concepts and allow the students to practice listening for and naming consonance and dissonance. [Activity 3](#) allows students who are proficient on a musical instrument to use this knowledge to improvise harmonies which are deliberately consonant or dissonant. [Activity 4](#) helps the students draw comparisons to similar concepts in other disciplines.

Consonance and **dissonance** are musical terms that have specific, slightly technical meanings, but the basic idea is one that can be grasped even by young children: Musical notes that sound good together are called **consonant**; notes that seem to clash, or sound unpleasant together, are called **dissonant**. (If you would like to find out more, please see [Consonance and Dissonance](#).)

Notes that are not in tune with each other are dissonant, of course, but even two notes that are tuned correctly may not sound good when they are played at the same time. Consonance depends partly on the physics of sound (see [Harmonic Series](#) and [Tuning Systems](#) for more information). But it also depends partly on the musical traditions of a particular culture (the technical meanings of the words come from the [Western](#) music tradition), and partly just on personal tastes.

Activity 1: Finding Consonant and Dissonant Notes

Goals and Standards

- **Goals** - The student will practice identifying two simultaneous pitches as either "consonant" or "dissonant".

- **Objectives** - After an introduction to the concepts, the students will play, or listen to, two simultaneous pitches, and will vote on which sound consonant and which dissonant.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 6 (listening to, analyzing, and describing music).
- **Grade Level** - K-12 (adaptable)
- **Student Prerequisites** - none
- **Teacher Expertise** - Teacher expertise in music is not necessary to present this activity at its most basic level. To lead more advanced students in a more involved discussion of consonance, dissonance, [intervals](#), and [resolution](#), the teacher must be familiar with Western music theory.
- **Time Requirements** - This activity is very flexible, time-wise. It can be easily combined with activities [2](#) and [4](#) to fill a single (approximately 45-minute) class period.
- **Evaluation** - Assess student learning by evaluating participation in the class discussion and "voting", or by orally quizzing each student on whether a note combination is consonant or dissonant.
- **Follow-up** - Help commit this lesson to long-term memory, by continuing to ask, throughout the rest of the school year, questions about the consonance or dissonance of music that they are listening to or learning.

Materials and Preparation

- You'll need an instrument to play on. The ideal instrument for this activity is one that the students are allowed to play, that makes specific pitched notes (preferably with little need to tune) for the children to experiment with, and on which you can see visually how "far apart" two notes are (i.e. how many other notes are in between them). A piano or electronic keyboard are ideal. Other possibilities: recorders, classrooms xylophones, metallophones, or bells. If the students cannot play, arrange a demonstration in which they can easily see how "far apart" the notes are (their [interval](#)).
- Prepare a simple, age-appropriate explanation of [consonance and dissonance](#). You may want to be ready with some examples; play with

the instrument ahead of time to find some combinations that you find clearly consonant or clearly dissonant.

Procedure

1. Give your explanation and examples.
2. If at all possible, let the children take turns playing combinations of any two or three notes. If you cannot let the students play the instrument, you play different combinations for them.
3. Let them vote on what sounds consonant or dissonant. If they can't decide, play the same combination several times. The entire class may agree in most cases, but allow disagreement for personal taste.
4. Students who are older or more musically experienced may want to turn this into an experiment of sorts; if notes are right next to each other, do they sound dissonant? What if there is one note in between them? Two in between them? And so on. What if they are very far apart?
5. Musically experienced students may also be encouraged to find a satisfying [resolution](#) to a dissonance. Discuss and demonstrate resolutions on the instrument.

Activity 2: Hearing Consonance and Dissonance in Recorded Music

Goals and Standards

- **Goals** - The student will practice identifying aural musical examples as "consonant" or "dissonant".
- **Objectives** - After an introduction to the concepts, the students will listen to a variety of recorded examples of music. The students will identify which pieces have more or less dissonance and will discuss the effects of the dissonance on the music.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 6 (listening to, analyzing, and describing music).
- **Grade Level** - K-12 (adaptable)
- **Student Prerequisites** - Preceding this activity with Activity 1, above, or some introduction to [consonance and dissonance](#), is strongly

recommended.

- **Teacher Expertise** - Training as a music teacher is not necessary to present this activity. The teacher must be able to easily identify dissonance in recorded music.
- **Time Requirements** - Depends on number and length of recorded examples.
- **Evaluation** - Assess student learning by evaluating participation in the class discussion or by orally quizzing each student on whether a short recorded excerpt contains dissonance.
- **Follow-up** - Help commit this lesson to long-term memory, by continuing to ask, throughout the rest of the school year, questions about the consonance or dissonance of music that they are listening to or learning.
- **Extensions** - For advanced music students, discuss whether music from particular eras, cultures, or genres, tends to sound consonant or dissonant. Ask them to identify unknown recordings as belonging to a particular era, culture, or genre, based at least partly on the consonance or dissonance of the music. With this extension, [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 9 (understanding music in relation to history and culture) is addressed.

Materials and Preparation

- You'll need a CD or audio tape player.
- Gather some examples of music from different periods (Classical, Modern, Baroque...) and/or different styles (Modern art music, jazz, folk, pop...) or cultures (European, Indian, Indonesian...). Try to have at least a few pieces with quite a bit of dissonance. (Twentieth-century art music, modern jazz, and movie music are probably the easiest places to find this; try Igor Stravinsky, Charles Ives, Thelonious Monk, or Charles Mingus, for example, or the sound tracks from scary or dramatic movies.)
- Have the recordings ready to play at appropriate places in the music, or know the track numbers for the pieces you intend to play.

Procedure

1. If possible, this activity should be done after [Activity 1](#). If that is not possible, begin this activity with an explanation of the terms.
2. Play short excerpts from your selections.
3. As the students are listening, have them raise their hands when they hear dissonance.
4. After several samples, have a discussion. Which types of music had more or less dissonance. Did some seem to have none at all? What adjectives (like "happy" or "creepy" or "exciting" or "annoying") would they use to describe each piece? What emotional effects do they think dissonance has on a piece of music?
5. Older or more musically experienced students may be asked: is the dissonance [resolved](#), or is it just "left hanging"? How long does it take to resolve the dissonance? What does this do to the feeling of tension and relaxation in the music?

Activity 3: Improvising Consonant or Dissonant Harmony on Instruments

Goals and Standards

- **Goals** - The student will practice choosing consonant intervals for improvised or composed harmonies.
- **Objectives** - After an introduction to the concepts, the students will take turns playing a melody and improvising a harmony to the melody by finding consonant intervals for each note of the melody.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standards 2 (performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music), 3 (improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments), 4 (composing and arranging music within specified guidelines), 6 (listening to, analyzing, and describing music), and 7 (evaluating music and music performances).
- **Grade Level** - 4-12
- **Student Prerequisites** - The students must be able to play, smoothly, accurately, and in tune, simple single-note lines on the instruments used in the activity.
- **Teacher Expertise** - The teacher must be able to conduct and direct the playing, and help the students find consonant harmonies.

- **Time Requirements** - Depends on number of students, and their comfort level with the activity. Can easily take one full class period.
- **Evaluation** - Assess student ability to find and play consonant intervals.
- **Follow-up** - Throughout the rest of the school year, continue to challenge the students to harmonize simple melodies by finding consonant intervals.
- **Adaptations** - Students who do not play an instrument, but who are comfortable singing, may be asked to sing consonant intervals against a known melody.
- **Extensions** - Ask advanced music students to compose, write down, and perform consonant harmonies, or to quickly improvise and play harmonies to a new tune. Very advanced students should be encouraged to compose lines using good voice leading.

Materials and Preparation

- The students will need access to instruments in the classroom. Instruments with fixed tuning (keyboard, xylophone, bells, for example) are ideal. If the students play other instruments (band or orchestral instruments, for example) well enough that tuning will not be an issue, that will also work well.
- Choose a melody to harmonize, and teach it to all of the students before the class period reserved for this activity. This activity works best if the students can play the melody as a solo with confidence. A slow melody will allow students more time to choose a note for the harmony.
- Also have the students do [Activity 1](#) before this activity. While doing Activity 1, help the class prepare a list of specific suggestions for finding notes that will be consonant with a given note. (Rules that they can discover, like "avoid the note right next to it", are ideal.)

Procedure

1. Remind the students of what they discovered about where to find consonant notes. Go over the list prepared by the class during Activity 1.

2. Have the students "warm up" by playing the melody you have chosen. You may want to further "warm up" their readiness to improvise a harmony by allowing them to experiment (on a keyboard, for example) to find notes that go with the notes of the melody; or by having some students play the notes of the melody one note at a time, while other students are allowed to "search for" consonant pitches.
3. Students take turns playing melody or harmony. On each turn, one or a few (not too many) students play the melody while one student plays a different note to "harmonize".
4. Depending on the students' maturity, confidence level, and ability to do this in a spirit of exploration and cooperation rather than critique and embarrassment, you may ask the students who are not playing to raise their hands either when they hear a consonance or when they hear a dissonance. If you add this element, you may want to remind the students that dissonance is acceptable in many styles of music, or point out that [resolving](#) dissonances is an important element in keeping music interesting and exciting. You may even want to challenge students to play dissonances deliberately.

Activity 4: Relating These Terms to Other Disciplines

Goals and Standards

- **Goals** - The students will become more comfortable with a general use of the terms, and use them to make connections and parallels between disciplines.
- **Objectives** - In a class discussion, the students will use the concepts "consonant" and "dissonant" to draw appropriate parallels between music and other disciplines and to categorize and draw appropriate inferences within each discipline. A written essay summarizing the discussion and/or giving personal opinions on the subject, can be assigned.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 8 (understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts).
- **Other Subjects Addressed** - Depending on the subject matter, this activity may also address goals and standards in social studies or

language arts.

- **Grade Level** - K-12 (adaptable)
- **Student Prerequisites** - The students should already be familiar with the terms in their musical context.
- **Teacher Expertise** - Teacher expertise in music is not necessary to present this activity.
- **Time Requirements** - 10-30 minutes, depending on the depth and breadth of the discussion, and student interest and engagement.
- **Evaluation** - Assess student learning by evaluating participation in the discussion or grading written essays.
- **Follow-up** - Throughout the rest of the school year, continue to use the terms "consonant" and "dissonant" whenever appropriate.

Materials and Preparation

- Choose a non-music area in which the students have already discussed the concepts of things which do or do not go together well, or initiate such a discussion during an appropriate class period. Some suggestions: color usage in the visual arts; ingredients in cooking; anomalies (the avoidance of, or the deliberate use of things that are "out of place") in the visual or performance arts or literature; or even, in social studies, the cultural "consonance" or "dissonance" that occurs when people do or do not behave in similar ways or expected ways.

Procedure

1. Remind the students of both of the previous discussions (of musical consonance and dissonance and also of the non-music subject). Encourage them to summarize some of the key points of both discussions.
2. Ask the students to draw comparisons between the two subjects. In the non-music subject, what might the students label "consonant" or "dissonant"? Why? What is the effect of "consonance" or "dissonance" in the other subject? Is dissonance used deliberately and why? Is it avoided and why? In what ways is this similar or different to consonance and dissonance in music? Are there any elements that are similar to the [resolution](#) of dissonance in music?

3. Have the students summarize the discussion. This may be an in-class summary of the main points of the discussion, or it may be a written essay including the student's personal opinions or conclusions as well as the main points of the discussion.

Music Conducting: Classroom Activities

Lesson plans for several conducting activities, to practice keeping steady rhythm, work on leadership and cooperation, learn about meter, and learn what a conductor does.

Introduction

Please see [Conducting](#) for an introduction to standard conducting techniques. The activities presented here, [Watching the Conductor](#), [Keeping a Steady Beat](#), [The Conductor Shows the Beat](#), [The Conductor Counts the Measure](#), and [The Conductor Gives Cues](#), simplify the concept and procedures of conducting a group of musicians, so that even fairly young students can take turns "being in charge".

Goals and Assessment

- **Goals** - The student will become familiar with the function of the conductor in a large ensemble. The student will demonstrate leadership skills and understanding of standard music performance practices, by conducting a large group, using appropriate motions based on a simplification of standard conducting technique, and will demonstrate ability to actively cooperate in a musical performance by following, with a group, a simplified conducting technique, and playing a percussion part at the appropriate time.
- **Grade Level** - K-12 (adaptable)
- **Time Requirements** - Each student should get a chance to conduct every activity, so time requirements depend somewhat on the number of students. Unless the class is very large, one (approximately 45-minute) class period should be sufficient for each activity. The activities may also be used as 5-minute warm-ups to other music activities or as active breaks from desk-centered work. If you plan to use them in this way, have just one student conduct each time you do the activity, keeping track of which students have already conducted each one.
- **Student Prerequisites** - The activities are ordered from simplest to most complex. Do as many as you like up to the point that they become too complex for your students, but it is recommended that you do them in order, as each activity builds on the skills developed in the

previous one. To do the first activity, students should be able to accurately mimic a rhythm, and should be able to independently clap a steady beat. (See [Rhythm Activities](#) if they need to practice these skills.)

- **Teacher Expertise** - The teacher should be familiar with basic conducting practices (see [Conducting](#)), and able to evaluate the students' success in conducting, staying on the beat, and producing correct rhythms.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 9 (understanding music in relation to history and culture, which includes awareness of the role of various musicians in a performance). Some activities also explore one of the most common ways of expressing [meter](#), a critical concept for understanding [time signature](#), addressing standards 5 (reading and notating music) and 6 (listening to, analyzing, and describing music). The activities also heighten awareness of a basic component of good ensemble performance, encouraging ability to critique performances knowledgeably (standard 7, evaluating music and music performances).
- **Other Subjects Addressed** - The activities also address [National Dance Standards](#) standard 1 (includes ability to move to a beat and respond to changes in tempo).
- **Follow-up** - You can continue to help students develop an appreciation for conducting, meter, and good performance practice, by continuing to allow students a chance to conduct their classmates.
- **Evaluation** - Assess students both on their performance as "conductor", performing the correct motions in the correct order with a steady beat, and their accuracy, as a "musician", in following the conductor and playing "on the beat".

Skills Developed in Conducting and Following a Conductor

- **Music Appreciation** - Understanding the purpose of conducting
- **Music Skills and Concepts** - Rhythm, Meter, Tempo, Steady beat
- **Math Concepts** - Counting, Grouping, Subdivision (in time) into Equal Parts (fractions)

- **Physical Skills** - Large Motor Coordination, Ear/Hand/Eye Coordination
- **Social Skills** - For the "conductor", leadership; for "musicians", following directions, paying attention, actively cooperating in a group

Materials and Preparation

- You will need a place and time when your classroom can be noisy. Children like this exercise, but it's only fun if they can be loud.
- You will also need something that can be the "Conductor's Baton". A short pointer or long pencil (preferably not sharp) will do.
- Both conductor and musicians will need objects, at around belly height, to beat time on. Desks, chair backs, or stacks of books will do. Modern conductors do not ordinarily make an audible sound when they conduct. In the earliest days of the orchestra, however, conducting did often involve beating loudly on the floor with a stick, and conductors (particularly teaching conductors) will still beat time aloud if they feel the ensemble is not watching the beat closely enough. This type of conducting will be easier for young children to follow.
- Some of the activities will require the students to have various instruments. Percussion is easiest; use whatever is available - drums, hand cymbals, maracas, jingle bells - or make or improvise your own instruments. (See [Percussion Fast and Cheap.](#))

Activities

Watching the Conductor

Objectives

- The student who is designated conductor will improvise a simple clapped or conducted rhythm and perform it in such a way that it is easy to anticipate and follow.
- The other students will pay careful attention to the designated conductor, clapping or playing on a percussion instrument at the same time.

Procedure

1. Setup: All students should be standing facing the conductor, who is standing facing them. Any instruments they will need or objects they will be beating on with a baton should be in front of them, within easy reach, at about belly height.
2. For this exercise only, the conductor does not have to keep a steady rhythm. The conductor claps whenever he or she likes. Encourage surprising rhythms, but discourage the conductor from "faking out" the other students. A gesture that looks like the beginning of a clap should always be followed through with a clap. This is a cooperative game, not a competitive one. All the students - conductor and "orchestra" alike - should be praised when the claps all sound at the same time.
3. The other students watch the conductor closely, and try to make their clap sound at exactly the same time as the conductor's.
4. Point out how loud and impressive it is when all the claps sound together.
5. To prepare for the rest of the activities, you can repeat the procedure with all the students beating on something (producing an audible sound) with "batons", or with the conductor beating with a baton and the others clapping or playing drums, bells, etc. **Batons should be in the right hand.**

Keeping a Steady Beat

Objectives

- The student who is designated conductor will clap and then conduct an audible steady beat.
- The other students will cooperate in keeping the beat chosen by the designated conductor, by clapping or playing on the indicated beat.

Procedure

1. Same setup. This time the conductor claps, then beats with the baton, a steady beat, which everybody follows as closely as possible.

2. Point out how much easier it is to anticipate the next clap when the beat is steady. The children should be listening for that "big clap" that sounds when they are all together.
3. Encourage different conductors to pick different tempos. The [tempo](#) is how fast or slow the beat is going. Discourage accidental changes of tempo. Beats that unintentionally get faster and faster, called **rushing**, or slower and slower, called **dragging**, are considered poor musicianship (unless the music specifically calls for changes in tempo such as accelerando).

The Conductor Shows the Beat

Objectives

- The student who is designated conductor will conduct a steady beat using only a visual signal, as in standard conducting technique.
- The other students will keep the beat chosen by the designated conductor, by watching the conductor carefully and clapping or playing on the indicated beat.

Procedure

1. Same setup. Same procedure as previous activity, except the conductor beats on air at belly height, making no sound, rather than on an object.
2. Point out that the beat is easier to see if it remains a quick, bouncing motion as if they are still beating on something.
3. The "orchestra" still claps or makes sound when the conductor's "beat" hits the bottom, the same as before. Tell the students that this is called **playing on the downbeat**.

The Conductor Counts the Measure

Objectives and Extensions

- **Objectives for Designated Conductor** - The student will conduct an audible steady beat, demonstrating a particular meter by using movements based on standard conducting technique.
- **Objectives for other students** - As a group, the students will keep the beat chosen by the designated conductor, and perform different sounds for each beat of the meter.
- **Extensions** - The following instructions are for a very simplistic style of conducting that relies mostly on sound for cues to convey the beat and meter. A real conductor working with trained musicians does not audibly beat out the time (except when frustrated). If you have older or more advanced students who are ready to conduct and be conducted using visual cues only, you may use the instructions at [Conducting](#) as a guide.

Introduction

- Ask the students if they have ever heard a conductor or band leader count off at the beginning of a piece of music. ("A-one-and-a-two-and-a-one-two-three-four", for example)
- Tell the students that music is divided into very short sections called **bars** or [measures](#). Each bar is only a few [beats](#) long, usually two, three, or four beats. This helps everyone keep track of where they are in the music. If you listen to the music, you can hear the bars and count along, one-two-three-one-two-three, or one-two-three-four-one-two-three-four. (For activities on listening for meter, see [Musical Meter Activities](#).)
- Tell the students that one of the conductor's main jobs is to show with the baton which beat (of the measure) is presently being performed.

Procedure for Measures of Two Beats

1. Same setup, with an object for conductor to beat on. The "orchestra" claps or plays on instruments.
2. The conductor holds the baton in the right hand.
3. The conductor beats measures, one-two-one-two-one-two, making two different kinds of motions:
4. On "one", the baton starts in front of the conductor (baton tip approximately in front of the middle of the chest), beats on the object,

- and bounces off to the right.
5. On "two", the baton starts off to the right (baton tip approximately in front of the right shoulder), beats on the object and bounces up to end up right in front of the conductor again.
 6. Point out how easy this makes it for the orchestra to keep track of where they are in the measure. Have them clap on one and stomp on two. Or divide the class into two sections. One section claps on one, the other claps or stomps on two. Or drums play on one, bells on two, etc.
 7. Once the conductors get used to the different motions, take away the object and have them "beat" in the air again.

Procedure for Measures of Three Beats

1. Same setup, but with three objects for the conductor to beat time on, one directly in front, and one in front and slightly to the conductor's right, one in front and slightly to the conductor's left.
2. Beat "one" is on the object in front of the conductor.
3. Beat "two" is on the object to the conductor's left.
4. Beat "three" is on the object to the conductor's right.
5. This time, divide the class into three groups, or have the class do three different things on the different beats (clap, stomp, and slap thighs, for example).
6. Again, if the exercise is successful, repeat it with the conductor "beating" in the air rather than on objects.

The Conductor Gives Cues

Objectives

- The student who is designated conductor will conduct the meter with the right hand while giving special cues with the left.
- The other students will watch the designated conductor carefully, playing the appropriate sound for each beat in the meter, or responding to left-hand cues.

Procedure

1. If you have older students who can handle all of the above and still want more, add cues.
2. Tell the students that with the left hand the conductor does other things like telling people to play louder or softer and giving cues.
3. Tell your students: holding the left hand out palm up means "louder"; holding it out palm down means "softer".
4. Let them experiment with this while conducting in two or three.
5. Tell your students that, with the left hand, the conductor may also give cues to people who don't play very often, like the cymbal or gong player, in case they have lost count of the measures.
6. Give a couple of students special instruments and tell them only to play when the conductor cues them by pointing at them with the left hand. Point out that, when giving cues, it is very helpful to make eye contact and to point with a dramatic gesture so that the players are not caught by surprise.
7. Rotate both the conducting and the special instruments so that everyone gets a chance both to give cues and to respond to cues.

Extensions and Related Activities

- Attend a conducted band, orchestra, or choir concert.
- View a video or television program of a concert in which the conductor can be seen at least some of the time.
- Following the concert or video, discuss what the students noticed the conductor doing or not doing. Was a baton used or the hands? Pointing? Eye contact? Body language? Vocal cues? If the program included pieces conducted by different people, did they notice differences in conducting style?
- Before the students attend the performance or watch the tape, tell them you will ask for a critique of the conducting aspects of the performance. Suggest that they listen for whether the ensemble plays precisely together, and watch the players and conductor for signs of visual communication. Was there good communication between the conductor and the performers? Did the ensemble have any problems playing "together"? Did the problems appear to be caused by

inattention in the players? Errors or ambiguity in the conducting? Lack of familiarity with, or difficulty performing, the music? Was any noticeable attempt made to "regroup"? If the ensemble did a very good job of playing together with precision, what practices did the students notice that might have helped them stay together so well? Were there any visual indications that they were together, such as breathing or moving at the same time? This can be either a class discussion or an unusual essay assignment.

- Invite a local group of musicians that uses a conductor to perform for your class. Give the conductor a chance to demonstrate and talk about what he or she does. Or invite just the conductor to conduct your class using the proper motions rather than beating on objects. Conductors of local amateur or youth music groups, or students of conducting or of music education at a local music school, may be particularly willing to do this for you.

A Tempo Activity

A lesson plan for a classroom activity that introduces the musical concept of tempo.

An introduction to the concept of tempo, and lists of terms, can be found in [Tempo](#). To introduce the concept and some common tempo indications to younger students, try the following activity.

Goals and Standards

- **Goals** - The student will become familiar with the most common tempo terms and respond appropriately when asked to perform at a specific tempo indication, or to name a tempo indication for a performance just given or heard.
- **Grade Level** - The activity is designed for grades 3-8, but may be adapted for older or younger students as appropriate.
- **Student Prerequisites** - Whether singing, singing with gestures, dancing, or playing instruments, students should be able to perform the piece(s) adequately before doing this activity. Choose pieces and performance modes that are comfortable, so that the students can concentrate on tempo.
- **Teacher Expertise** - Teacher expertise in music is not necessary to present this activity. The teacher should be familiar and comfortable with the terms and concepts regarding [tempo](#), and should be comfortable leading the performance at various tempos.
- **Time Requirements** - If you wish to spend an entire class period on the activity, make certain you have enough pieces and tempos, and include the discussion of metronomes. A short demonstration of tempos will only take 15-20 minutes, or you can use the activity as a very short (just one piece, one or two tempos, each time) 5-minute warm-up to music class or active break from desk work.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standards 1 (singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music) or 2 (performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music), and 6 (listening to, analyzing, and describing music).
- **Other Subjects Addressed** - The activity also addresses [National Dance Standards](#) standard 1 (identifying and demonstrating movement

- elements and skills in performing dance).
- **Objectives** - The students will learn the meaning of the common tempo indications chosen by the teacher. As a group, the students will perform at least one piece (singing, singing with gestures, dancing, or playing instruments) at different tempos that are appropriate for the tempo markings they are learning. Given a piece and a tempo, the student will choose an appropriate tempo marking to describe it.
 - **Evaluation** - Assess students on ability to maintain a steady beat at different tempos and on knowledge of tempo terms. To test knowledge following the activity, either ask individual students to indicate (by clapping a beat, for example), what speed they would choose given a certain tempo marking, or ask them to name an appropriate tempo while they listen to a recorded piece of music.
 - **Follow-up** - Help commit this lesson to long-term memory, by continuing to ask, through the rest of the school year, "what tempo term would you use to describe the song we just sang?" and similar questions.

Materials and Preparation

- Decide which tempo indications (see [Tempo](#)) you would like the students to learn.
- Choose a simple song, song with gestures and dance steps, or dance, or a piece of instrumental music. (Or you may wish to choose more than one.) Choose pieces the students already know, or teach them the one(s) you have chosen before doing this activity.
- If you are going to discuss metronome markings, bring a metronome to class.
- If you are going to test the students following the activity using recordings, choose a variety of recordings.

Procedure

- Write your chosen terms and their meanings on the board, or give the students a handout with the terms, and go over them with the students.
- Have them sing, play, or dance the chosen piece(s) at different tempos (allegro, largo, vivo, etc.). Include variations in the tempo, such as accelerando if you like.

- If you are using more than one piece for this activity, try each piece at several different tempos. You may choose a "tempo marking", or have students take turns suggesting them. Have the students vote, or reach a consensus on, an appropriate actual tempo for each tempo indication suggested (with direction from you as necessary), and after trying several, have them vote on the best tempo marking for each piece.
- Most children love to play with metronomes. If there is one available, you may also want to discuss metronome markings. Try each chosen piece at several different metronome markings suggested by the students, and then ask them to choose a metronome marking for each piece. Discuss which tempo marking (allegro, largo, vivo, andante, etc.) they would assign that metronome marking for that piece. They may also enjoy trying to guess at which number the metronome was set.

Activity Extensions for Advanced Students

- Have the students learn a variety of the less common tempo terms.
- Help them explore what it means for a piece to feel fast or slow. Find recordings of (or have the students perform) different pieces that have the same tempo marking but noticeably different actual tempos. (Use a metronome to determine actual tempos.) Discuss the possible reasons for the differences. Are they cultural or historical? Are they affected by the style or genre of the music, the rhythms or the number of notes per beat?

A Musical Dynamics Activity

A lesson plan for an activity that introduces children to the musical concept of dynamics.

Practicing dynamics on a particular instrument requires control and technique, but simply learning about dynamics is an invitation to make noise, so this is a fun concept to introduce to young children. Practicing dynamics away from one's instrument can also be useful for young players who find it difficult to remember to play with dynamics and good tone quality because they are still mastering rhythms and fingerings.

Goals and Standards

- **Grade Level** - Intended for grades 3-8; adaptable for younger or older as appropriate.
- **Student Prerequisites** - Students should be able to sing, well and comfortably, the songs chosen.
- **Teacher Expertise** - Teacher expertise in music is not necessary to present this activity. The teacher should be familiar with the terms and concepts regarding [dynamics](#) and comfortable leading the singing.
- **Time Requirements** - If you want to give everyone a chance to "conduct", have a variety of several songs ready to sing, and plan to use an entire class period. Otherwise, the discussion and activity can be done in about twenty minutes. Once the concepts are introduced, you may use it as a short (5-minute) warm-up to other music activities or break from desk work.
- **Goals** - The student will learn standard terms for musical dynamics, explore using dynamics, and practice singing musically and with control at a variety of different dynamic levels.
- **Objectives** - The student will learn the terms used to indicate musical dynamics and will sing familiar songs with a group, at a variety of dynamic levels, responding first to verbal instructions from the teacher and then to hand signals from a "conductor". Following the activity, the student will be able to define common dynamics terms in simple English (e.g. forte is "loud") and respond to verbal or hand signals with appropriate dynamics.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standards 1 (singing, alone and with others, a varied

repertoire of music) and 6 (listening to, analyzing, and describing music).

- **Evaluation** - Assess students on achievement of many different dynamics while still singing with good tone, and on ability to follow conductor's dynamic directions. Following the activity, you may test the students, verbally or on paper, on the meaning of dynamics terms.
- **Follow-up** - Throughout the rest of the year, continue to ask for appropriate dynamics, using the correct terms, whenever the students sing or play an instrument.
- **Adaptations** - For students who have trouble singing, you may adapt this activity to have them recite, speak, or make noise on [simple percussion instruments](#) at different dynamic levels.
- **Extensions** - For more advanced music students, have the students memorize a short piece on an instrument and practice responding quickly to instructions or signals to play at different dynamic levels. Teach the students notation for dynamics and ask them to play or sing, individually, a simple piece with no written dynamics, adding dynamics to make the performance more musical, interesting and dramatic. On the written part, have them add the (properly notated) dynamics that they are using.

Materials and Preparation

- Choose a song or songs that the students already know, or teach them one that is easy for them. Any song will do, although one with some dramatics that suggest dynamics may be more fun. Choose a song that is reasonably short, or else do the verses at different dynamic levels.
- Familiarize yourself with any [dynamics](#) terms that you are planning on introducing to the students. You may use this [PDF file](#) as a handout if you would like to give the students a copy of the terms. (If you can't get the PDF file, you may use the figure [below](#).)

Procedure

1. Tell your students that music can be loud or quiet or in between. Introduce any of the terms you wish your students to learn, or simply continue to talk about loud, quiet, and medium.

2. Sing the song together quietly (mezzo piano). Sing it again (or the next verse) even more quietly (piano). Encourage them to continue to project voiced (not whispered) notes with clear, sustained [pitch](#) as they get softer. Repeat until they are practically whispering; how many different levels of quiet can they get while still sounding good?
3. Repeat the previous step with mezzo forte, forte, and so on. Encourage them to sing with sustained, controlled notes as they get louder. How many different levels of loudness can they get before they are simply shouting?
4. The next step will need a "conductor". You can conduct, but if there is time, let the students take turns conducting. Choose a conductor and demonstrate some typical conducting signals: hand held higher with palm up means louder, hand held lower with palm held down means quieter, hand moving up or down means gradually louder or quieter. **The conductor in this activity does not have to conduct the beats!**
5. Repeat the song again, or choose a different song if you're bored. This time, have the conductor vary the level of loudness during the verse. Try suddenly loud and suddenly quiet as well as gradually getting louder and quieter. For younger students, let them have fun with this and be silly. With older students, ask them to experiment with using the dynamics to make the song prettier or more exciting, dramatic, or interesting.

Common Dynamic Levels

mf **mezzo forte** = **medium loud** (pronounced "MET-soh FOR-tay")

f **forte** = **loud** ("FOR-tay")

ff **fortissimo** = **very loud** ("for-TISS-im-oh")

fff **fortisissimo** = **very, very loud** ("FOR-tiss-SISS-im-oh")

ffff **and so on...**

mp **mezzo piano** = **medium quiet** ("MET-soh PYAN-oh")

p **piano** = **quiet** ("PYAN-oh")

pp **piannissimo** = **very quiet** ("PEE-an-ISS-im-oh")

ppp **pianississimo** = **very, very quiet** ("PEE-an-ISS-ISS-im-oh")

pppp **and so on...**

A Musical Accent Activity

Lesson plan for an activity that helps music students practice using accents.

See [Dynamics and Accents in Music](#) for introductory information on musical accents. The proper method for performing an accent varies greatly between different types of instruments and styles of music, and can present quite a challenge for the young instrumentalist. By temporarily separating reading from concerns on how to properly perform accents on a specific instrument, this activity simplifies the task of reading and performing "accents", allowing an intermediate success that can translate into confidence in performing accents correctly.

Goals and Evaluation

- **Goals** - The goal of the activity is to introduce students to the concept of musical accents and to help beginning instrumentalists practice reading and performing accents.
- **Objectives** - The student will read notated rhythms - of gradually increasing complexity - that include accented notes, and perform them accurately as a simple percussion piece, either individually or with a group.
- **Grade Level** - This activity is designed for students in grades 4-8, but may be used by younger or older students who are at the appropriate level of musical awareness.
- **Student Prerequisites** - The students should be able to accurately and easily read and perform the rhythms in the exercises used.
- **Teacher Expertise** - The teacher should be able to read music well and must be able to act as the group "conductor" during this activity.
- **Time Requirements** - Unless you have many rhythm/accents examples prepared, this activity takes less than twenty minutes. Once the concepts are introduced, it can also be used as a very short (less than five minute) warm-up to other music activities or as a quick break from desk work.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 5 (reading and notating music).
- **Adaptations** - To introduce the concept of accents to very young or non-reading students, simply alter the lesson plan to have the students echo short, simple rhythms with accents that are performed for them.

This "listening and performing" activity may also be included along with the activity as described.

- **Extensions** - Following the activity, musically experienced students may be asked to write out short exercises similar to the ones they have already done. Share them by copying them or having the students write them so that the entire class can see them (on a board, for example). Let the class try the student-written exercises. Or let them trade papers with each other and perform each other's challenges as solos.
- **Evaluation** - Assess students on ability to read and perform rhythms and accents accurately and consistently, either with the group or individually in a "test" performance. If students can perform at the desired level of complexity, they are ready to practice performing accents in the proper manner on real instruments. If they cannot, have them continue to do this activity regularly over a period of weeks or months, starting with easier rhythms and gradually introducing more complexity, alternating with lessons on playing accents correctly.

Materials and Preparation

1. Prepare your board or a handout by reproducing the rhythms and accents below and/or making up your own, based on your students' age and musical training. You can copy this [PDF file](#), or use the figure [below](#) to make a handout. If you want an activity that will last longer, make up more lines at the correct difficulty level for your students.
2. Level I is for students who are younger and have little or no musical training. Level II is for students who have learned to read music. Level III is even more challenging.
3. Decide how the rhythms will be performed. Students can play on drums or other percussion instruments, if available, or play on a single [pitch](#) on any instrument. You may also use body percussion or other simple percussion techniques (see [Percussion Fast and Cheap](#)); for example clapping on regular notes and stomping, slapping thighs, or just clapping louder on accented notes; or slapping the table (or a thigh) with one hand for regular notes and both hands for accented notes.
4. Gather or make any instruments or equipment the students will need.

Procedure

1. Explain that accented notes are louder than the notes around them. Show them an accent on the board or handout. Notes with an accent mark should be louder. Explain how you want regular and accented notes to be performed in this activity. (See number 3 of "Preparation".)
2. Before starting each rhythm, you must establish a steady beat, in order to get everyone to start at the same time and the same [tempo](#). Clap four times before the students begin, or count steadily and crisply, "One, two, three, go", or use any method of "counting off" that your students are already accustomed to.
3. Start with a slow beat. Do one rhythm at a time, all together as a group. For more of a challenge for older students, speed up the tempo, or ask them to perform rhythms alone, either after they have heard them, or sight-reading.

Accent Activity Suggested Rhythms

Level I



Level II



Level III



Simple Rhythm Activities

Lesson plans for three activities that encourage students to perform rhythms accurately and consistently, and to be aware of the effect of rhythmic sounds on the style of the music.

Here are three simple classroom activities that promote accuracy in two areas (rhythms and keeping time) that are fundamental for good musical performance: [Rhythm Imitations](#), [Karaoke Percussion](#), and [No Karaoke Percussion](#). The activities can also be used to develop awareness of the effect of percussion and rhythm on musical styles.

Goals and Standards

- **Grade Level** - K-12 (adaptable for a wide range of ages and musical experience)
- **Student Prerequisites** - Any student who can clap along with a steady beat is ready for these activities. The activities will still have value for older students with more musical experience if the rhythms are sufficiently complex and/or a discussion of musical styles is included.
- **Teacher Expertise** - Teacher training in music education is not necessary to present this activity, but the teacher should be capable of presenting rhythms accurately and consistently. (See [Rhythm](#) and [Meter](#).)
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 2 (performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music). If the Karaoke activities include a discussion of percussion backgrounds as an element of style, this also addresses music standards 6 (listening to, analyzing, and describing music) and 9 (understanding music in relation to history and culture). If the students are reading written rhythms, standard 5 (reading and notating music) is also addressed.
- **Evaluation** - For assessment, decide on a level of rhythmic complexity that the student should be able to achieve in echoing rhythms or in playing a consistent, independent percussion part, then assess whether the student is succeeding at that level. If not, these activities may be repeated throughout the school year, with gradual increases in complexity as the students get more practice.

- **Follow-up** - Help develop basic rhythmic skills in the students by continuing to give them, throughout the school year, simple rhythm parts to accompany music they are learning, and continuing to ask them to echo specific rhythms, particularly rhythms that they are learning to read or perform.

Activity 1: Rhythm Imitations

Objectives

- **Time Requirements** - This activity works best as a short (5-15 minute) class warm-up done often in preparation for other musical activities (such as singing, playing instruments, or doing the activities below).
- **Objectives** - The student will perform specific rhythms accurately, either while reading them or immediately after hearing them.

Materials and Preparation

- No preparation is necessary if you want the students to copy heard rhythms.
- If you want the students to read written rhythms, write some short rhythmic figures, beginning with very simple rhythms and gradually adding complexity, or find some music with rhythms of the appropriate complexity. Any single-line music will do for this; students should be encouraged to be capable of ignoring the melodic information, when asked to convey only the rhythmic information in the line.

Procedure

- Clap (or play on a rhythm instrument) any short rhythm (or, for students learning to read music, have the student read a written rhythm).
- Have a student clap or play the same rhythm back to you, at the same speed.
- For students who find this challenging (or if you have difficulty deciding whether or not they echoed your rhythm correctly), keep the

rhythms short and simple. For students who do well, give them longer, more challenging rhythms to echo.

Variations

1. Make the rhythm a collection of claps, stomps, and other sounds. (Keep it short unless the students are quite good at it.) Have the student copy it using the correct sounds.
2. Make the rhythm a collection of sounds on any percussion instruments you have available. (See [Percussion Fast and Cheap](#) for suggestions.)
3. Make this a game, with students taking turns imitating your rhythm (change it often). Students have to sit down if they miss a rhythm, and the last student standing wins.
4. Let the students have their turn making up short rhythms for each other to imitate.
5. If you don't have very many students, you can make this a game in which each student gets more and more difficult rhythms until they miss one. Keep track of how many each student got correct before they missed.
6. If you want the students to echo the rhythms as a group rather than individually, you will probably need to "count off" for them. Count 2 or 4 beats before you start your rhythm, and then give them exactly the same count to start theirs.

Activity 2: Karaoke Percussion

Objectives

- **Time Requirements** - Allow one (approximately 45-minute) class period if it will take the students some time to learn their rhythms. If the students can learn the rhythms very quickly, this activity can be done as a 5-15-minute warm-up before other music activities, or as an active break between desk-work sessions.
- **Objectives** - The student will perform a rhythmic ostinato (suitable to the student's age and musical experience) as an accompaniment to a recording, keeping an accurate rhythm and beat.

Materials and Preparation

- Be prepared for a noisy activity.
- Have percussion instruments ready for the class to use or have the class make their own instruments ahead of time. (See [Percussion Fast and Cheap](#).) Don't forget the possibilities of "found percussion" (pots, lids, spoons, pencils, books, etc.) and "body percussion" (claps, slaps, finger snaps, stomps, etc.).
- Select music that you will be adding karaoke percussion to. Cheerful, fast-tempo music that your students enjoy is best. If you are going to include a discussion of percussion as an element of style, make sure you include music from a variety of styles (for example, various kinds of pop, rock, jazz, and world music). Have your tape or CD player ready, and have tapes ready at the correct spot or know CD track numbers.
- Unless you will have the students invent the rhythms to be played, you may want to decide on them ahead of time. Use rhythms of appropriate complexity: for beginners, this may be simply playing on the beat, playing off the beat (harder!), playing only on alternate beats or only on the first or last beat of a measure; experienced students will want something more complex and interesting.

Procedure

- Usually you add the vocal parts when doing karaoke, but in this activity, the class is going to add percussion parts. For very young children, this will probably mean simply adding noise. That is fine, although you can encourage them to add the noise on the beat or only during certain phrases in the music.
- Encourage older students to add a particular repetitive rhythm to the music. Beginners may all need to be on the same rhythm. More musically experienced students may each be given a different rhythm.
- Have the students listen to the song first. Have them clap along, so that they feel the basic beat of the music. Children with some musical experience may be able to identify rhythms that are already being emphasized in the music. Encourage older, musically experienced students to come up with a steady, patterned rhythm that fits the music.

For other students, teach them the rhythms that you have decided on, by letting them play each rhythm with you.

- As much as possible, students should play different, complementary rhythms, instead of all playing the same rhythm. This activity is most fun for small groups, with each student having a different instrument and rhythm so that everybody is contributing a unique sound. Break a larger class into small groups of students learning (or agreeing on and practicing) the same rhythm on the same type of instrument. If possible, break the class into smaller performing groups (with one student from each rhythm group) once the rhythms are learned, and allow the groups to perform for each other, giving each student a chance to play their rhythm independently.
- Let the students experiment and settle on their rhythms with the music playing, then have a "performance" with everybody doing their chosen rhythms. This is even more effective if students enter one at a time (you can point to a student when it is her turn to enter) and then steadily continue their chosen rhythm as more students enter.
- Students with some musical sophistication will enjoy the challenge of adding percussion in a "stylistically appropriate" way. Work with the students to come up with "percussion tracks" for several pieces in very different styles. Discuss differences in choice of instruments and in rhythms for the different styles.

Activity 3: No Karaoke Percussion

- **Time Requirements** - If it will take some time to teach all the students their parts, allow one (approximately 45-minute) class period. If the students will learn and perform their rhythms quickly, use this as a 5-15-minute class warm-up before other music activities, or as an active break between desk-work sessions.
- **Objectives** - The student will perform a rhythmic ostinato that complements other rhythmic ostinatos being performed simultaneously, keeping accurate rhythm and a steady beat.
- **Extension** - Musically experienced students who succeed at this activity can be asked to provide both percussion and vocal parts for a song, with no recorded support. (You may want to provide piano or other accompaniment.) Have the students decide on a variety of

rhythmic ostinatos to accompany a song that they know well. Have them sing and play the rhythm parts at the same time.

Materials and Preparation

- If your students have a strong sense of rhythm, they can do this no-background-music version of the activity.
- Provide each student with a percussion instrument, or let them decide on their own "found" or "body" percussion.
- Decide whether you will provide and teach the rhythms, or let the students come up with their own, or use the same rhythms they have been playing in the previous activity.

Procedure

- Designate one student with a fairly loud instrument as the beat keeper. This student establishes the beat and plays steadily on the beat during the entire session.
- Other students enter one at a time, steadily playing their rhythms, to produce a complex rhythmic ostinato. If they do this well, the result should sound like the background rhythm track to a pop, rock, or Latin tune.
- Once all students have been playing for some time, the beat keeper can end the session. Or, for more of a challenge, the beat keeper can name a student, who must then play a different rhythm.
- For students ready for a challenge, teach them, or ask them to come up with, several very different "percussion tracks" (using different instruments and different rhythms and meters). After playing each ostinato for some time, ask the students what style or genre of music it might be used for. Can they identify the elements (instruments? a particular rhythm? meter?) that most strongly suggests that style or genre?

Other Rhythm Activities Available

You can find other activities that explore various aspects of rhythm in [Music Conducting: Classroom Activities](#), [A Tempo Activity](#), [Musical Meter](#)

[Activities](#), [Talking Drums](#), and [Message Drums](#). For more about reading rhythms, see [Duration: Note Length](#), [Duration: Rest Lengths](#) and [Time Signature](#).

Message Drums

For early primary students, an introduction to message drums, suitable for inclusion in a unit on music, percussion, communication, history, or world cultures.

Introduction and Overview

Message drums are actually large [slit gongs](#), usually constructed from hollowed-out logs, that are used to send messages over considerable distances. This lesson plan, suitable for a wide range of ages, includes an explanation and discussion of message drums, and an activity demonstrating how they are used. It is a cross-discipline lesson, appropriate for a **music class** unit on percussion or instrument traditions around the world, a **social studies** unit on world cultures (message drums were independently invented in several different places, including Africa, Asia, and the Americas), a **language arts** unit on the history of communication or a poetry unit on the rhythm of language, or a **science/math** unit on codes and messages.

Goals and Standards

- **Grade Level** - K-12 (adaptable)
- **Student Prerequisites** - Students must be able to cooperate to accomplish goals in small groups with minimal supervision. (If they cannot, see "Adaptations".)
- **Teacher Expertise** - Teacher expertise in music is not necessary to present this activity.
- **Time Requirements** - One (approximately 45-minute) class period for the presentation and activity.
- **Goals** - The student will learn how and why message drums have been used in several cultures around the world.
- **Objectives** - The class will discuss various forms of pre-electronic-era long-distance messages and draw conclusions about why a culture might choose one form over another. Small groups of students will each develop a code consisting of several messages that can be sent using two drum pitches, and will demonstrate their code to the class by using it to successfully send messages across a classroom.

- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standards 8 (understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts) and 9 (understanding music in relation to history and culture).
- **Other Subjects Addressed** - The activity also addresses [National Standards in the Social Studies](#) standards 1 (culture), 2 (time, continuity and change), 3 (people, places and environments), and 8 (science, technology, and society), and [National Standards for the English Language Arts](#) standard 9 (Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles).
- **Evaluation** - Base assessment on discussion and activity participation, and on each group's success in developing and using a code according to the given parameters.
- **Adaptations** - If the students cannot cooperate in small groups with minimal supervision, do the activity as a class instead.

Message Drums

Introducing the Subject

Give young students copies of the [Slit Gong Message Drum](#) handout. If possible, show students a picture of a real message drum from a book or website. (As of this writing, there were useful photos at [Art-Pacific](#) and [Papua New Guinea - BUAI Digital Information Project](#).)

Tell your students: Before telephones and email, before cars, planes, trains, television, radio, or even telegraph, sending messages quickly across a distance was not easy. Different cultures solved this problem in different ways.

Have the students brainstorm to see how many of these old methods of communicating they can name. Some possibilities they may come up with, or you can suggest if they have trouble naming any: special runners or pony-express-style riders; signal towers, signal fires, smoke signals, semaphore, and of course, message drums. Ask them what geographical constraints might make one method better than another, and why. For

example, which would be better on a flat, open prairie? In an area with mountains, hills, or large rivers? In a heavily forested area? (If they are having trouble deciding, ask them to imagine that they are on a mountain top or an open prairie or in a thick rain forest. Would it be easy to see a signal fire? Could they find a big log to make a drum? How easy would things be for a runner or fast pony?)

Tell your students: Several cultures around the world discovered a way to send messages that could be heard over great distances. These cultures lived in places where very big trees grew. People in different parts of Africa, Asia, the Pacific Rim, and the Americas sent messages using drums made out of huge logs. They would take a log from a large tree; the bigger the log, the bigger its sound would be and the farther it could be heard. A long slit would be cut in the side of the log, and the log would be hollowed out through the slit, leaving wooden ledges, or lips, on each side of the slit. If they wanted the drum to be able to make a lower note and a higher note, they would hollow it out more under one lip than under the other. To play messages, they beat on the drum's lips with sticks, beating out rhythms of high and low notes.

These giant log drums are sometimes called "talking drums", but they are completely different from the famous [talking drums](#) of western Africa. Technically speaking, the message-sending logs are not drums at all, since they do not have a thin skin or membrane that vibrates when they are beaten. Instead, when an edge of the slit is beaten, the entire log vibrates like a big cylinder-shaped gong, so musicologists call this type of instrument a **slit gong**.

Each culture that used these slit gongs developed a message "language". The villages that used the drums would agree on a sort of code of drum "sentences". In some cultures, the drum message sounded like a real sentence, but without the words. For example, "the river is flooding" might sound like "da-DUM-da-da-DUM-da". To keep messages from sounding too much alike, they sometimes used very long, descriptive sentences to translate into their drum language. Messages could be relayed from village to village, but if the message travelled to an area where a different language was spoken, it might not be understood anymore.

After this introductory discussion, you may ask young students to draw on and color the Message Drum handout. You can get a PDF file of the handout [here](#). It is also included as a figure at the end of this module, but using the PDF file will give a nicer-looking handout. Give the following suggestions: Finish the picture on the handout by filling in details. Use your imagination. Many message drums have carvings of animals or of a face at each end. They are played by someone using a big stick or beater. Often there are small stands under each end of the drum to keep it off of the ground and let it vibrate more freely. Many message drums are kept in a shed so that they don't get rained on. Add some of these details and then color your picture.

You may also want to do "The Rhythms of Language" activity from [Talking Drums](#) and/or the "Make a Drum Code" activity below.

Activity: Make a Drum Code

Materials and Preparation

- Be prepared for a noisy activity!
- Each group will need pencils and paper.
- You will need something to drum on and something to drum with. The class can take turns with one set of "drums" in order to reduce the noise level. Or each group can have its own drums, so that they can practice and test possible message codes. A wooden "tongue drum" is ideal, since this is basically a small box version of a slit gong, but any drums that can produce two or three different pitches (a set of bongos for example) will do. Homemade percussion (e.g. drumming on two different sized pots with a wooden spoon) is fine, too. For more ideas, see [Percussion Fast and Cheap](#).

Prodedure

1. Tell the class to imagine that they live in small villages a few miles apart. There are no telephones, radios, email, or TV. Usually, if they want to talk to their friends in the next village, they have to walk there

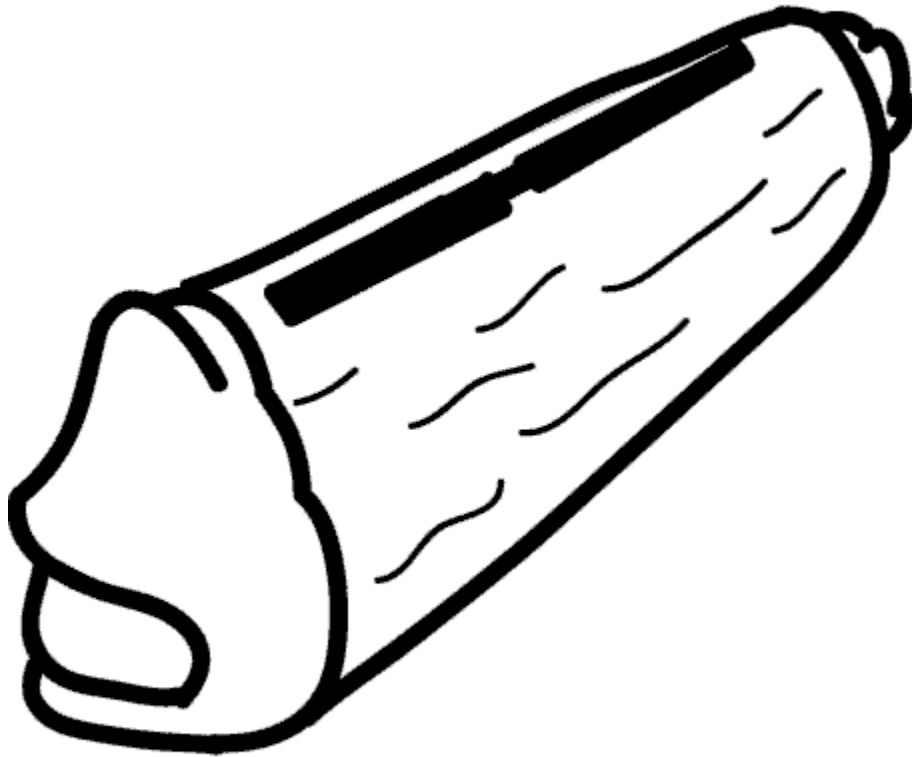
to do it. But sometimes they might just want to send a message that their friends will get right away. They need to develop a code that both villages know. Suggest keeping the codes short and simple for clarity, and remind them that there are two ways to make messages sound different from each other: using the two different notes and making the rhythm different.

2. Have the class brainstorm about messages that might be useful to send. Emergency messages like "send the doctor", news like "strangers have arrived", and everyday messages like "I'll be home late" are all acceptable.
3. Divide the class into small groups (3 to 6 students per group).
4. Each group is to develop a code of three to ten messages. (You decide the number, based on age, attention span, and class period length.) They decide which messages they would like to be able to send, and what rhythm stands for each message. Have older children invent a way to write the code down so that they can remember it.
5. After a suitable period of time, reassemble the class. Give each group a chance to show off their message code. When it is a group's turn, they split into message senders and receivers, on opposite sides of the room. (Let them take turns if there is time.) For older students, make sure both groups have a copy of their written code as a reminder. You stand with the senders and point to or whisper which message they should send. Have them beat the message on the drum(s) and see if the receivers can name the message correctly.

Further Study and Suggested Resources

- The wooden "tongue drum" is a smaller version of the slit gong. It is popular enough that you may be able to find it in a music store that specializes in percussion or even in a souvenir shop. Or see if you can get a local percussionist or a member of the percussion section of a local ensemble or nearby high school to demonstrate one for your class.

"Slit Gong" Log Drum



This kind of log drum is called a slit gong.
The log was hollowed out through the slit.
When you beat on it, the whole log vibrates like a gong.
Beating on one side of the slit gives a higher sound
than beating on the other side.
Messages beat on a big slit gong can be heard miles away.

Talking Drums

A lesson on the talking drums of Africa, suitable for inclusion in a unit on Africa, communication, music, percussion, or world cultures. Includes discussion points and four simple activities.

Here are [discussion points](#) and four classroom activities designed to accompany an introduction to West African talking drums: [Stretching Raises the Pitch](#), [Tonal Languages](#), [Talking Kazoos](#), and [The Rhythms of Language](#). You may do any or all of the activities, in any order, either during or following the discussion.

Goals and Requirements

- **Goals** - The student will understand and be able to define, describe, or demonstrate: tonal language, talking drum, message drum, the relationship between talking drums and tonal language, and how to change the pitch of a drum.
- **Grade Level** - K-12 (adaptable)
- **Student Prerequisites** - none
- **Teacher Expertise** - Teacher expertise in music is not necessary to present this activity.
- **Time Requirements** - The discussion with a single activity or with minimal demonstrations of each concept can be done in one (approximately 45-minute) class period. For more complete exploration of the activities, or to include presentation of a book or a demonstration by a guest, allow two class periods.

Introducing the Subject

Materials and Preparation

- For younger students, make copies of the handout. It is available as a [PDF file](#) or [below](#), as a figure. (The PDF file will give a nicer-looking handout.)
- A globe, map of the world, or map of Africa would be useful as a visual aid.
- If you are going to use rubber bands or a guest percussionist to do the [Stretching Raises the Pitch](#) demonstration, you may want to be

- prepared to do this during your discussion.
- If you are going to have someone demonstrate a tonal language, or have a picture book, photos, or sound clips of talking drums to share (see [below](#)), you may also want have these ready to present during the discussion.
 - If you want young students to color the handout during or after your discussion, have their crayons or markers available.

If appropriate, give each student a copy of the "Talking Drums" handout. If possible, present photos, videos, or audio clips (see [below](#)).

Tell the students: Some people confuse talking drums with message drums, but they are actually something completely different. [Message drums](#), or slit gongs, are huge log drums that can be heard miles away, and their messages are usually in some kind of code, although the code may be based on spoken sentences. Message drums were invented independently by several different cultures around the world. Some other cultures also invented a kind of "waisted drum" (in Korea and India, for example), but only western Africa has "talking drums".

Note: If it is appropriate, you may want to present [Message Drums](#) to your class before you cover talking drums.

Tell the students: Talking drums are not made from big logs. They are a kind of drum called a **waisted drum**. They are called "waisted" because they have an hourglass shape, with a "waist" in the middle, just like a person's body has a waist in the middle. Skins are stretched over the ends of the drum, held in place by many cords. When the cords are tightened, the skin gets pulled tighter and the sound of the drum gets higher. When the cords are relaxed, the sound goes lower. The player holds the drum between his upper arm and left side and uses his arm to squeeze and relax the cords while he is striking the drum with a curved stick in his right hand.

Note: You may want to present the activity (see [Stretching Raises the Pitch](#)) at this point in the discussion.

If you have a world map or globe, help the students locate western Africa and specifically the countries Ghana and Nigeria. Tell the students: The peoples of western Africa, for example the Ashanti people of Ghana and the Yoruba people of Nigeria (both of which have talking drums) speak tonal languages. English is not a tonal language. The word "hat" means something you put on your head. If your voice rises while you say "hat", it might sound as if you are asking a question. If your voice falls, it might sound as if you are quite certain of the hat. If your voice rises and then falls, it might sound as if the hat surprises you. If your voice stays even, it might sound as if the hat bores you. But in every case you are talking about something that goes on your head.

If English were a tonal language, though, saying the syllable "hat" while your voice rises might mean something you put on your head; saying it while your voice falls might mean something you put on your feet. Saying it while your voice rises and then falls might mean "come here", and saying it evenly might mean an animal with long ears that hops. Some words in some African dialects are so precisely tonal that you could write out the notes for a particular word on a musical staff.

Note: If you have invited a speaker of a tonal language for a demonstration, this is the best point in the discussion for it. You may also do the [Tonal Languages](#) activity at this point, or save it for immediately following the discussion.

Tell your students: So imagine the player of the talking drum. Using his left arm, he can control very precisely the tone of each syllable of his talking drum. What comes out of the drum is not the alphabet sounds of the words, but all the other things that go into a phrase - lengths, rhythms, pitches,

rising and falling syllables. In a very tonal language, that is enough. The people who speak the same dialect as the drummer will be able to hear what his drum is saying. But, of course, if they are from a village that speaks with a different accent, they may not be able to understand his drum at all!

Note: At this point you can do some of the activities below, or the "Make a Drum Code" activity from [Message Drums](#), or share any books or sound recordings you have.

Activity: Stretching Raises the Pitch

Objectives and Standards

- **Objectives** - Using either rubber bands or available musical instruments, the students will demonstrate or attend a demonstration of the basic acoustics principle that the stretching and tightening caused by pulling on a vibrating object raises its [pitch](#). (For a more complete demonstration project, see [Sound and Music](#)).
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 8 (understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts).
- **Other Subjects Addressed** - The activity also addresses [National Science Education Standards](#) in physical science, science and technology, and science in personal and social perspective.
- **Evaluation** - Assess student learning by evaluating class participation or asking relevant questions in an oral review or on a written test: e.g. "How can you make a drum sound higher?"

Your students may appreciate a demonstration that stretching and relaxing an "instrument" will raise and lower its pitch. Consider doing one of the following:

- The simplest way to demonstrate this is with rubber bands. Let one student stretch a rubber band between two fingers while another

student plucks it. Listen to the sound the rubber band makes; the tighter it is stretched, the higher the sound. If it is stretched or relaxed quickly immediately after being plucked, you may even be able to hear the pitch slide up or down, just like it does in a talking drum.

- Many hobby books on making musical instruments include instructions for making a drum with a stretched head held in place by strings. If it is made of good materials, you should be able to change the pitch of such a drum by tightening or loosening the strings. Pursue this only if you are interested in a major class project which will require specific materials and take several hours.
- You may be able to get a local band director or percussionist to bring in some drums with heads that can be tightened and loosened to change the pitch. Ask for a demonstration, and an explanation of the methods of tightening and loosening drum heads. Many percussionists won't have a waisted drum, but many other drums (such as orchestral tympani) are also "tunable".
- The basic idea can also be demonstrated with any stringed instrument (guitar, violin, banjo, cello, etc.): as you turn the tuning peg you are winding or unwinding the string, making it tighter or looser.

Activity: Tonal Languages

Objectives and Standards

- **Objectives** - Students will actively participate in a demonstration of how tonality affects meaning even in a nontonal language, by demonstrating and explaining how different inflections cause slight differences in the meaning of a short word or phrase in English.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standards 8 (understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts) and 9 (understanding music in relation to history and culture).
- **Other Subjects Addressed** - The activity also addresses [National Standards in the Social Studies](#) standard 1 (culture), and [National Standards for the English Language Arts](#) standards 4 (Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of

audiences and for different purposes.) and 9 (Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles).

- **Evaluation** - Assess student learning by evaluating class participation or asking relevant questions in an oral review or on a written test: e.g. "What is a tonal language?"
- **Adaptations** - For best comprehension, this activity should be presented to students using their native language, dialect, and accent. The teacher should adjust the activity accordingly.

English is not a tonal language, so it can be difficult for English speakers to appreciate how important inflection is in tonal languages. Here is a short activity that can help and requires no materials or preparation.

Procedure

1. Have students try saying the word "here" in many different ways: slowly or crisply, with the voice rising, falling, monotone, rising and then falling, etc. Which one means "Do you want it here?" Which means "Yes, I want it here!". Do different tones seem to mean "You called my name and I'm present" or "Are you looking for me? I'm over here" or "Ha ha, you never spotted me. Here I am!" Can they discover other "here"s that seem to mean different things?
2. They can try the same game with other words: "there", "this", "that", "what", "OK", "cool", "hey", "now", "dude", etc. Can the students think of other words or short phrases that work well as demonstrations?
3. Have the students pretend that they are hearing someone call them from a long distance away. What does it sound like? Do their voices adopt a kind of sing-song quality in which the last syllable sounds about a minor third lower than the rest of the name? This is close to the type of sounds in some tonal languages.
4. Can the students imagine an adult saying "bye bye" or "what a smart little girl" or "that's a no-no, sweetie" to a little baby? Can they imagine an excited preacher singing out "Amen!" or "Do you believe?" What does it sound like? These are also times when English can sound a little like a tonal language.

Activity: Talking Kazoos

Objectives and Standards

- **Objectives** - Students will construct simple kazoos or use commercially-made kazoos. Students use the kazoos, or humming, to try to convey meaning using only the rhythm and inflection of a sentence.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 8 (understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts) and 9 (understanding music in relation to history and culture).
- **Other Subjects Addressed** - The activity also addresses [National Standards in the Social Studies](#) standard 1 (culture), and [National Standards for the English Language Arts](#) standards 4 (Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.) and 9 (Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles).
- **Evaluation** - Assess student learning by evaluating class participation and success in communicating and guessing phrases.

Making a talking drum would be a serious undertaking, and most other instruments don't have the ability to change pitch as quickly as the human voice does. You can have the students experiment with the idea of talking without words by having them take turns humming a phrase and trying to guess what was hummed. For example, one student might hum "My name is Alexander" by making all the sounds that he would when he says that phrase, but with his mouth closed. Or, if you have enough time, make "talking kazoos."

Materials and Preparation

- One pocket comb per player
- Tissue paper
- Or use commercially made kazoos

Procedure

1. For each kazoo, cut out of tissue paper a rectangle with a length slightly longer than the comb and a width slightly wider than twice the width of the comb.
2. Fold the tissue paper in half over the teeth of the comb.
3. Holding the tissue paper in place over both sides of the comb, play the kazoo by placing the lips lightly against the tissue paper and humming.
4. Encourage the students to use common and easily recognizable phrases (for example, an expression or slang phrase that is very popular at the moment), and to put as much expression as possible into the phrase. Explain that the goal is to communicate, not to stump their audience. When a phrase is successfully guessed, the student that hummed it has succeeded.
5. Using the kazoos, the students take turns humming familiar phrases to each other and trying to guess the phrase based simply on its rhythm and inflections.

Activity: The Rhythms of Language

Objectives and Standards

- **Objectives** - Using body percussion or simple drums provided or made for the purpose, the student will turn the rhythm of a given sentence into a two-toned drum rhythm.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 8 (understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts) and 9 (understanding music in relation to history and culture).
- **Other Subjects Addressed** - The activity also addresses [National Standards in the Social Studies](#) standard 1 (culture), and [National Standards for the English Language Arts](#) standards 4 (Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.) and 9 (Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns,

and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles).

- **Evaluation** - Assess student learning by evaluating class participation.

Tonal inflections are not the only part of language that talking drums mimic. In any language, words, phrases and sentences have a natural rhythm. Here is an activity that helps students appreciate the rhythm of language. For a more complete exploration of this concept, see the activity in [Message Drums](#).

Materials and Preparation

- This activity can be done with any two drums that sound different from each other. You can use toy drums, real drums, or homemade drums.
- Or turn ordinary objects into drums (pots, bowls, desks, books) and drumsticks (pencils, rulers, sticks). See [Percussion Fast and Cheap](#) for other suggestions.
- Or if you do not want to bother with drums, use clapping, finger-snapping, thigh slapping, stomping, or other "body percussion."

Procedure

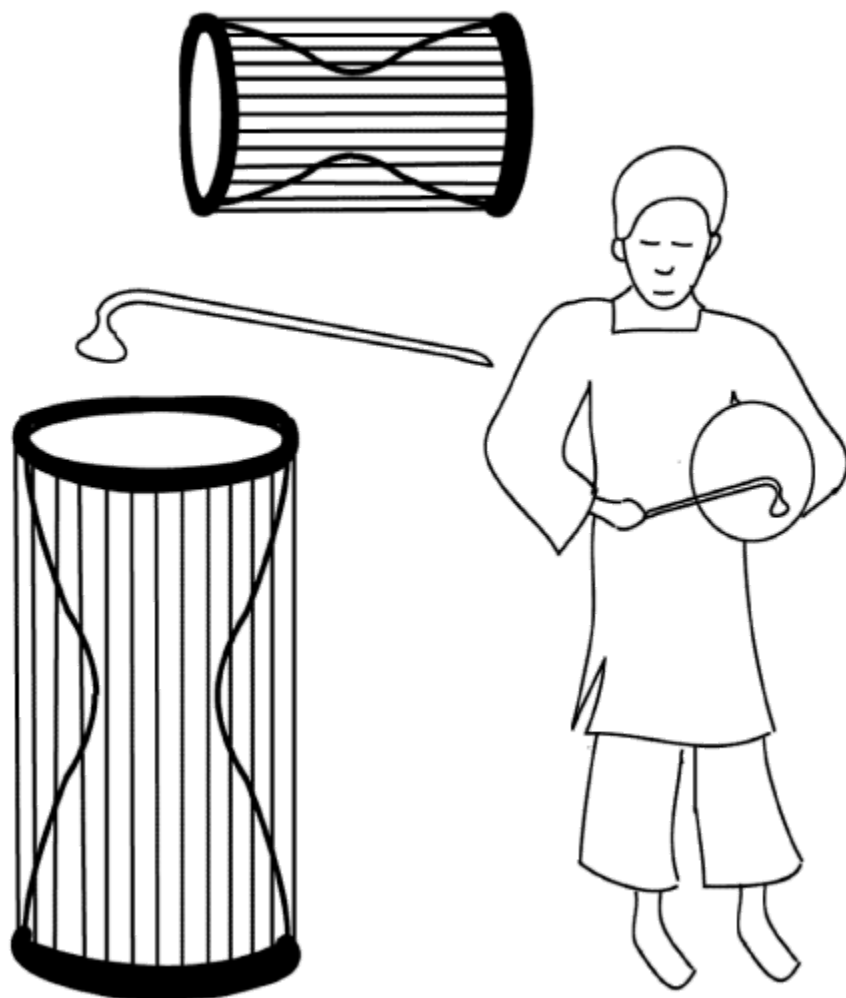
1. If necessary, introduce or review the concept of strong and weak syllables.
2. Assign one drum or sound (e.g. clapping) for strong syllables, and one drum or sound (e.g. finger snapping) for weak syllables.
3. Let the students take turns.
4. One student says a sentence. Encourage long, creative sentences. ("I wish we could have pizza for lunch today" rather than "I want pizza".)
5. Another student beats or claps out the rhythm of the sentence (da-DUM-da-da-da-DUM-da-da-DUM-da-da). Encourage them to mimic the natural rhythm of the sentence as much as possible. After one person has played the rhythm, see if the entire group can "play" the sentence together.
6. Ask the students: Is there a particular length or type of sentence that is easiest to turn into a rhythm that everyone can agree on? Do the rhythms of the sentences sound alike or different? If two sentences sound too much alike, what could be done to make them sound different?

7. If you are also studying poetry, try this activity with poetry. Can the students identify meter, line length, and poem type just from drum rhythms?

Further Study and Suggested Resources

- If a picture book is appropriate for your students, consider sharing with them *Talking Drums of Africa* by Christine Price (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973). Featuring the Ashanti people of Ghana and the Yoruba of Nigeria, it explains how the drums are put together, how they are used, how they "talk", and the part they play in the culture.
- If any members of the class speak a tonal language (Chinese, for example), or if a parent or other adult is available for a demonstration, ask them to help the class with a show-and-tell that demonstrates how the meaning of words in their language changes with inflection.
- At the time of this writing, photos and sound clips of talking drums could be found at the web site of the [Nigerian Talking Drum Ensemble](#).

Talking Drums



Caribbean Music: Calypso and Found Percussion

For students in grades 2-7, an introduction to a musical tradition from the West Indian island of Trinidad, with a song to learn and related activities to do.

Introduction and Overview

Calypso is a style of music that developed in the West Indies, the islands of the Caribbean. It began in Trinidad, and spread through the islands, influencing many other popular styles of music, in the West Indies, the U.S., and around the world. This module includes several ideas for presenting Calypso to young students.

Use this lesson for:

- **Music class** - Make and play percussion instruments, and/or sing and play percussion using typical Caribbean rhythms.
- **Music concert** - Learn the songs (with percussion accompaniment) for a performance, particularly a multicultural concert.
- **Social studies class** - Do any of the activities, as part of a unit on West Indies cultures, cultures of the Americas, history of the Caribbean or of the Americas, African-American history, or African-American music.
- **Creative writing** - Do the "Introduction to Calypso", and then have the students write some calypso-style lyrics.

This module includes several different activities, all related to Calypso music. There is a short [Introduction to Calypso music](#), [songs](#) to sing with calypso-style rhythms, [a "found percussion" activity](#), [Calypso-style rhythms](#) to play on percussion, and a [creative writing activity](#). Choose whichever are appropriate for your class; doing all of them will probably require at least five class periods. There are also [suggestions for finding recordings](#) to listen to.

An Introduction to Calypso

Goals and Standards

- **Goals** - Following the presentation, students should be able to correctly identify photos, drawings, and audio recordings of steel drums, locate Trinidad and Tobago on a world map or globe, and give an age-appropriate description of the history of calypso music.
- **Objectives** - The students will listen to steel drum, calypso, and/or calypso-style music, look at photos, drawings or videos of steel drums, locate Trinidad and Tobago on a map, and listen to a lecture on the history of calypso music.
- **Grade Level** - K-12 (adaptable)
- **Student Prerequisites** - none
- **Teacher Expertise** - Teacher expertise in music is not necessary to present this activity.
- **Time Requirements** - 10-20 minutes. Can be combined with one or more of the activities below to fill one (approximately 45-minute) class period.
- **Evaluation** - Assess student learning by including questions covering the material in a unit test, or by quizzing the students orally following the activities.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 9 (understanding music in relation to history and culture).
- **Other Subjects Addressed** - The activity also addresses [National Council for the Social Studies](#) standard 1 (culture) and 9 (global connections).
- **Extensions** - If at all possible, the lecture should be followed by at least one of the activities below, or a similar activity that makes the information more concrete and memorable. Older students may be asked to do independent research on the subject.

Materials and Preparation

- You will need a globe, world map, or map of the Americas.
- Have an audio player and some CDs or tapes for the children to hear. See [below](#) for a list of suggestions.
- Have the tapes ready to play at the right spot, or know the CD track numbers.

- Pictures of steel pan drums or of steelbands, or video of a steelband performance, would be a useful visual aid. (You may use the drawing included here if you like.) Even better, contact any steelbands in your area to see if they would be willing to send a member or two for a demonstration. With younger students, you may also want to include pictures of the islands in your presentation while you are talking, to help focus their attention.

Steel Pan Drum



Today's steel pan drum is crafted by a skilled instrument maker, but it retains the basic shape of an upside-down oil drum with its bottom specially shaped to produce a

variety of
notes.

Procedure

1. Ask the students if they can name any kinds of (U.S.) American music that were strongly influenced by African music. There are many right answers to this question: blues, gospel, soul, and jazz, as well as newer African-American styles such as rap, and, in fact, most rock and pop styles.
2. Tell the students that Africans were also brought to many Central American, South American, and Caribbean countries. Whether or not your discussion also includes the cruelty and injustice involved will depend on the age and maturity of your students and how much you have already covered this subject. You don't want to use this lesson to introduce the horrors of slavery, but if they already understand what was going on, you can point out some of the influences this had on the music. There is also a large Indian population on Trinidad, the result of plantation owners encouraging immigration from India (as replacement workers when they were forced to free their slaves) using misleading promises that led to a kind of indentured servitude. Again, this may be more information than your class needs, or it may be appropriate and relevant to their studies.
3. Help the students find Trinidad on a map or globe. Tell them: Today Trinidad is part of a small country called "Trinidad and Tobago". (You can also help them find the smaller island of Tobago if you like.) But this island was once owned by Spain, and then by England, and many people came to the islands from India and France as well as west Africa. (Have them locate western Africa, India, England, Spain, and France on a map or globe). And all of those people brought their favorite traditions and favorite songs and music with them. When they settled on Trinidad, they heard each other's music, and eventually the African-Trinidadians invented a kind of music that sounded a little bit African and a little bit European but was also uniquely Trinidadian.
4. Play some of the music you have chosen for them.
5. Tell the students: Calypso began as a type of protest music. African-Trinidadians in the eighteen-hundreds were not allowed to talk as they

worked, but they were allowed to sing. Many of the song leaders became very good at improvising words to songs in order to comment on the news of the day. ("The Banana Boat Song [Day-O]" of Harry Belafonte fame is the type of call-and-response work song that this could be done with.) Calypso songs also had improvised words that commented on the latest news and sometimes on life in general, but they were more clearly protest songs that often featured sarcasm and wit. The subversive nature of the music alarmed the authorities, who in 1884, in an effort to stop it, banned the playing of skin drums. That hardly stopped the Calypsonians; they just made instruments out of bamboo instead. Bamboo makes a nice sound with a definite [pitch](#) when you hit it with a stick; the bigger and longer the piece of bamboo, the lower the sound. (See [Sound, Physics, and Music](#) for more information, or [Sound and Music](#) for activities related to this.) So the calypso players cut many different lengths of bamboo and formed what they called **tambo bamboo** bands. The government then banned the playing of bamboo tubes, claiming that the bands encouraged violence, but the Calypsonians still kept playing. Their bands had always included instruments other than skin drums or bamboo: stringed instruments, for example, and maracas, and bottle-and-spoon. But in the 1930's they began to make drums out of metal objects.

6. If you have any pictures or even a real pan drum for the students to look at, this is the best time to show them.
7. Tell the students: The calypso bands didn't just pick up pots and pans and beat on them. What they did was find useful objects and work on them until they became musical instruments. At first, the musicians made their own instruments, often out of the bottoms (the **pans**) of metal shipping containers, paint cans, and garbage cans. A good instrument maker could often shape a pan so that it would play different pitches when it was hit in different spots. By the end of the 1930's there were bands made up only of pans: **steelbands**. During the Second World War, empty 55-gallon oil drums became widely available on the island. The now-professional instrument makers perfected their technique, making and selling pan drums that could play an entire scale and that could specialize in playing [melody](#), [harmony](#), [bass](#), or [rhythm](#).

Note: The steel drum is the only acoustic (non-electric) instrument invented in the twentieth century.

In the 1950's, the unique sound of calypso became widely known and popular around the world, particularly in the U.S. Today the steel pan is the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, and there are official calypso competitions every year. People of all races enjoy and perform the music. Strings, saxes, clarinets, trumpets, tin whistles and percussion are all popular instruments at the competitions, although not as popular as the steel pans. And the focus of genuine calypso is still on improvising clever, humorous, and topical lyrics that still often poke fun at the rich and the powerful. But the sounds and rhythms of calypso can be heard in many other places, too: in movies, jazz, dance music, and in other, newer Caribbean music styles.

8. At this point, you can ask your guest for a demonstration, or play some more calypso-style recordings for them (to focus their attention, ask them if they can guess what types of instruments they are hearing), and/or introduce the related activities you will be doing.

"Found Percussion"

Goals and Standards

- **Goals** - Students will make musical instruments, with a variety of pitches, from found objects.
- **Objectives** - Students will bring from home a variety of discarded objects that make interesting sounds when struck. The students will sort the found objects by type and use them, alone or in groups, to assemble collections of similar objects (or similar-sounding objects) with different sizes, that can be used to play three-[pitch](#) percussion parts. Each student or group will demonstrate their finished percussion instrument to the class and/or use it in the following activities.
- **Grade Level** - K-12 (adaptable)
- **Student Prerequisites** - none

- **Teacher Expertise** - Teacher expertise in music is not necessary to present this activity.
- **Time Requirements** - One (approximately 45-minute) class period.
- **Evaluation** - Evaluate neatness, cooperation, and visual presentation, according to your usual rubric for craft activities, as well as student success in constructing an "instrument" with three similar sounds of different pitch.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standard 9 (understanding music in relation to history and culture).
- **Other Subjects Addressed** - The activity also addresses [National Council for the Social Studies](#) standard 1 (culture).
- **Extensions** - Older, gifted, or ambitious students may want to design and make instruments tuned to make specific pitches (more like an actual steel drum, mbira, or xylophone), that could be used to play a melody, from found objects. Encourage them to find objects that ring with clear, definite pitches (nails, rake tines, bamboo sticks, blocks of hard wood, metal bowls, and heavy cardboard tubes are some possibilities), and help them research easy ways to tune the objects.

Materials and Preparation

- Plan ahead to give your students plenty of time to find and bring in "found" objects that they can use to make instruments. Suggest that they look for discardable objects that have a nice or interesting sound. Send home notes of explanation if necessary. Possible suggestions (depending on how much and what type of work you will want them doing in class): clean, empty metal cans of all sizes, with no sharp edges; clean, empty plastic tubs and lids of all sizes; pieces of bamboo or dowels, cut (at home by a parent) into various short lengths; small pieces of hardwood lumber; empty cardboard tubes from paper towel and wrapping paper rolls, or sturdy cardboard containers such as oatmeal boxes. You may find further ideas in [Percussion Fast and Cheap](#) or [Sound and Music](#).
- You may want to have calypso music to play in the background as they are working on their instruments.
- Be prepared for a noisy activity.

- Optional: If a messy activity is OK, you may want to supply, or have the students supply: some dry beans or beads for maraca-type sounds; sticky clay, plaster, water, or sand to "tune" the objects, and/or art supplies to decorate the instruments.
- You may also want to supply string and/or strong scissors and tape.
- The students will need beaters or drumsticks to play the instruments with. Rulers, heavy pencils, wooden spoons, real drumsticks, short dowels, or pieces of bamboo are all possibilities. You can supply these, have the students supply them, or use whatever happens to be at hand.

Procedure

1. Tell your students that since the 1950's, calypso music has mostly been played on professionally crafted instruments, including trumpets, saxophones, clarinets, guitars, and drum sets, as well as the traditional steel pan drum. But in its early days, Calypso was often played on instruments that people made from things they could find, including bamboo tubes, paint cans, shipping cans, garbage cans, and oil drums (big metal barrels that oil was stored or shipped in). Make sure they understand that the objects generally were not played as they were found, but were turned into instruments by the musicians.
2. Depending on how many objects are available, you may want to pool the materials and have the students work in groups, or let them trade or select objects if they are working alone. Each student or group should try to gather a collection of similar objects, for example plastic tubs of various sizes.
3. Have the students experiment with "playing" each of their objects. Do some sound higher than the others? Can they get more than one sound from the same object? Can they arrange the objects from lowest to highest sound? If they all sound the same, can they change the pitches of some of them, by cutting the cardboard tubes for example. If you don't mind the mess and the instruments are not going to be permanent, they can try tuning containers by sticking clay or tape to them, or filling them with water, sand, or plaster.
4. One group may prefer to make maracas of different sizes and pitches, by filling some containers with dried beans; prevent some messes by

- sealing the containers with strong tape once they have a sound that they like.
5. Have the students experiment: Do their objects give their best sound when they are held in the hand? Hung from a string? Put on a desk? Taped to a board? Laid across two two boards or dowels with some space beneath them? Tapped with fingers or with another object, or slapped against a thigh or the heel of a hand?
 6. Once they have decided on their objects and decided how best to play them, have them assemble their final instrument from at least three differently-pitched objects and give a demonstration to the class. You may want to use some of their instruments to accompany a [song](#) or to play [calypso rhythms](#).

Calypso Rhythms

Goals and Standards

- **Goals** - Students will learn to perform calypso-style rhythms.
- **Objectives** - Students will listen to and imitate one or more calypso-style rhythms. Students will perform rhythms as a group, either all playing the same rhythm, or playing a variety of rhythms at the same time. Students will display good musicianship by keeping a steady beat, keeping to the same beat as the group, and playing rhythms accurately.
- **Grade Level** - K-12 (adaptable)
- **Student Prerequisites** - none
- **Teacher Expertise** - The teacher or an assistant must be able to accurately demonstrate the rhythms and lead the class in playing them. If the students will be playing more than one rhythm at a time, the teacher should be comfortable leading simple percussion ensembles.
- **Time Requirements** - Only a few minutes to learn each rhythm
- **Evaluation** - Evaluate students on participation as well as rhythmic accuracy.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standards 2 (performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music) and 9 (understanding music in relation to history and culture).

- **Other Subjects Addressed** - The activity also addresses [National Council for the Social Studies](#) standard 1 (culture).

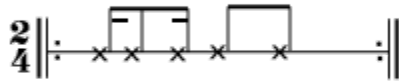
Materials and Preparation

- Review the rhythms below. If you are not a musician, listen to the recordings and make sure you can demonstrate the rhythms accurately.
- Decide how many, and which ones, you will teach to the class. Plan to teach younger, musically inexperienced students only a single rhythm. Plan to teach older, musically experienced students a variety of rhythms.
- Decide what will be used to play the rhythms. Some possibilities: They may use instruments they have made, assembled, (see [above](#)), or been given, or body percussion (see [Percussion Fast and Cheap](#)). Arrange for the desired instruments to be available during the class period, and plan for a noisy activity.
- Decide what the final performance experience will be. Some possibilities: They may play the rhythms alone, to accompany a recording, or to accompany a song that they sing (see [below](#)), either in class, or as part of a formal performance.

Procedure

1. If they are going to make their own [percussion instruments](#), do that activity first.
2. Demonstrate one of the rhythms. Have the students echo the rhythm, either individually or as a group. (To help groups start together, count crisply and steadily, "One, two three, go...")
3. If the students learn the rhythm easily, introduce a new one.
4. If the students learn more than one rhythm easily and accurately, divide them into groups, assigning one rhythm to each group, and see if the class can play different rhythms simultaneously.
5. After an appropriate amount of practice time, have the class use the rhythms) to accompany a recording, or to accompany a song that they have learned. Younger or musically inexperienced students may need to be divided into "singers" and "rhythm section". If so, give each student a chance to do both.

Calypso Rhythms



If you cannot read music rhythms, listen carefully to the rhythm [recordings](#) below, or try picking up some rhythms from your recordings. Only the fifth rhythm is written as a three-pitch rhythm, but if your students have all assembled three-pitch "instruments, you can alter any of the

given rhythms to
be multi-pitch.

If you can't read music, you may find these audio clips useful. A metronome in the background keeps the basic beat to help you get oriented:

- [Rhythm 1 being played by shaking a plastic container \(of the sort that margarine or sour cream are sold in\) filled half-way with dry beans](#)
- [Rhythm 2 being played by hitting the bottom of an empty box of oats \(the cylinder-shaped cardboard type of box\)](#)
- [Rhythm 3 being played by beating an empty cardboard tube \(this one had had wrapping paper on it\) against the heel of a hand.](#)
- [Rhythm 4 being played by shaking a can of nuts.](#)
- [Rhythm 5 being played by beating with a pen on the lids of three different sizes of empty plastic containers.](#)
- [Rhythm 6 being played by tapping on the lid of a plastic container with dry beans in it, for a sort of snare effect.](#)

Songs with Calypso Rhythms

Goals and Standards

- **Goals** - Students will sing a song using calypso-style rhythms.
- **Objectives** - Students will learn either a traditional Caribbean tune or a tune that has calypso-style rhythms, and will sing it as a group.
- **Grade Level** - K-12 (adaptable)
- **Student Prerequisites** - none
- **Teacher Expertise** - The teacher or an assistant should be able both to lead the singing and to provide or lead the accompaniment. Note that a rhythm-only accompaniment, or rhythm and guitar, would be very appropriate. If you feel you cannot lead singing-with-percussion, you may simply have the students sing (and play) along with a recording.
- **Time Requirements** - Because of rhythmic complexity, it may take students longer to learn these tunes than standard children's songs.

- **Evaluation** - Evaluate students on participation as well as accurate pitch and rhythm.
- **Music Standards Addressed** - [National Standards for Music Education](#) standards 1 (singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music), and 9 (understanding music in relation to history and culture).
- **Other Subjects Addressed** - The activity also addresses [National Council for the Social Studies](#) standard 1 (culture).

Materials and Preparation

- Choose a song or two with Calypso-type rhythms to teach to the class. You may want to use one of the songs you have found a recording of. Some songs that are traditionally associated with a calypso-style performance and are often found in songbooks and recordings for children include: "The Banana Boat Song (Day-O)", "Matilda", "Jamaica Farewell", "Sloop John B", "Tingalayo", and "Brown Girl in the Ring". Or you may use the songs provided here, [Caroline](#) and [Marianina](#). Please note that these **are not** traditional Caribbean tunes; instead, so that you may feel free to copy them, they are tunes that are in the [public domain](#) (in the U.S.) that have been altered slightly in order to give a strong Calypso feeling to the rhythms. If you can't open the PDFs, the songs are also available as figures [below](#). (Readers who have access to a version of a genuine Caribbean tune that is clearly in the public domain are invited to contact the author.)
- Become familiar enough with the song(s) that you will be able to teach and lead them with confidence. If you need to hear the tunes in order to learn them, you can listen to [Marianina](#) and [Caroline](#).
- Arrange for accompaniment, by yourself, a friend, or the students themselves. Accompaniment is important to get a "calypso" sound. Piano is not ideal; but a keyboard that has a marimba or other percussion setting might do. Guitar, string bass, and/or winds (even recorders) in whatever combination is better. In either case, try to include at least some percussion; or you may consider a percussion-only accompaniment.
- Have enough copies available, as needed, of the words, music, and accompaniment parts.

Procedure

1. If they are going to make their own [percussion instruments](#), do that activity first.
2. If students are providing the accompaniment, assign parts and rehearse the instrumentalists. The [calypso rhythms](#) above should work as accompaniment to just about any appropriate song you choose. Several short rehearsals usually work better than one long one.
3. Meanwhile, start teaching everyone the song. This may also take several sessions. You can listen here to the melodies of [missing_resource: Caroline.mid][Marianina](#) if you need to.
4. Add the accompaniment to the singing for the final rehearsals. Even if the song is not a part of a concert, try to find an audience for a final "performance".

Writing Calypso Lyrics

Materials and Preparation

- If you'd like to emphasize the creative, improvisatory nature of real calypso, and your students are up for the challenge, consider having them write a bit of calypso themselves.
- Choose a simple tune that the students are familiar with, either a song that they have learned in class (see [above](#)), or one of the tunes that you have a recording of. Tunes associated with calypso are preferable, but not necessary.
- If the students do not already know the tune very well, play the recording for them often, or work with them on singing it.

Procedure

1. Remind the students that traditional calypso singers improvise the words of their songs. That means they make them up right on the spot, as they are singing, only a few minutes after they find out what their song is supposed to be about. At the big calypso contest in Trinidad every year, they often use a standard melody and make up funny, clever songs about something that has been in the news recently or

- something that they have noticed about life. The songs are often complaint or protest songs about things that they think should be changed.
2. Tell the students they do not have to make up the words as they are singing. They can have some time to think about it and make up the words and write them down. Tell them which tune you are going to use and remind them of it by playing it for them or letting them sing it together.
 3. Ask the students to make up new words to go with the tune. Their song could be a humorous complaint about something they would like changed (longer recesses, or being allowed to have a dog, for example), or it can be a funny commentary on something that has happened recently, at school (a game they've learned in P.E.), at home ("what happened to my missing homework assignment"), or in the news (an escape at the zoo, or a heavy snowfall, for example). If necessary, remind them that being mean or personal is not funny.
 4. You may let them work in groups or alone.
 5. If necessary, check the words of each song before you allow it to be performed.
 6. Allow groups to perform their song together. Brave individuals can sing their songs by themselves, or you may make copies so that the class can sing each other's songs together.
 7. If there are any particularly clever or humorous songs, you may want to consider sharing them in a performance for parents or for the school.

Listening to Calypso

Genuine calypso is not that popular outside the islands; you will probably not find it at your local library or CD store. But steelband music, or even just a calypso-style sound is easier to find.

Listening Suggestions

- Many children will already be familiar with the tunes "Under the Sea" and "Kiss the Girl" from Disney's *The Little Mermaid*.
- Some collections of songs for children (particularly multicultural collections) include calypso-sounding versions of songs like

"Tingalayo", "Matilda", "The Banana Boat Song (Day-O)", and "Brown Girl in the Ring".

- Harry Belafonte's performances, while not genuine improvised calypso, contributed greatly to the first big craze for the calypso sound in the U.S. They are still relatively easy to find.
- Steelband albums marketed to tourists (for example *Steel Drum Classics "Best of the Best"*, produced by Barefoot Records and C and B Studio) are also not genuine calypso, but most of them do have the right sound.
- If you want some examples of the real thing, check with your favorite music recording distributors.

Songs to Use

These tunes are not from Trinidad. So that it is easy to copy and use them in the classroom and concerts, tunes that are in the [public domain](#) (in the U.S.) have been altered slightly in order to give a strong Calypso feeling to the rhythms. (Readers who have access to a version of a genuine Caribbean tune that is clearly in the public domain are invited to contact the author.)

Caroline

F **C7**

One, two, three, Car - o - line, Tell us what's the mat -

- ter with thee. One, two, three, Car - o - line,

F

Tell us what's the mat - ter with thee. Pa - pa says yes, Ma -

C7 **F** **C7**

- ma says no, Pa - pa says yes, Ma - ma says no. I

F **C7**

want but him, he wants but me. I want but him, he

F

wants but me.

The Sea Breeze (Marianina)

D **A7**

1. There's a fair - y fly - ing o'er the sea.
 2. O'er the land she flies a - - long the grass.
 3. Quick she darts up o - ver moun - tains high.

D

Light and air - y as a bird is she.
 Leaves and flow - ers love to see her pass.
 All the clouds are gath - 'ring in the sky.

A7

All the waves leap up and call in glee,
 All call out to stay the fleet - ing lass,
 Fast they fol - low with a mer - ry cry,

D

"Ma - ria - ni - na, fly no more. Be with us a - mid the
 "Ma - ria - ni - na, be a flow'r. Dance with us through-out the
 "Ma - ria - ni - na, come from far, why not tar - ry where you

A7 **D**

war, be a wave and dance to shore. Ma - ria -
 hour, for we feel your mag - ic pow'r. Ma - ria -
 are, dance with us and be a star. Ma - ria -

A7 **D**

ni - na, Ma - ria - ni - na, Be a
 ni - na, Ma - ria - ni - na, Dance with
 ni - na, Ma - ria - ni - na, Dance with

A7

wave and dance for - ev - er more."
 us, and be a lit - tle flow'r."
 us, a twin - - kling, glanc - ing star."